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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY, 1968

VOL. 22, NO. 6

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE BABY DOLL MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Baby Doll Sandra had known many men—intimately and too well. Now her lovely blackmailing little mouth was stilled in death—and Mike Shayne must smash a ring of Murder to find her killer.

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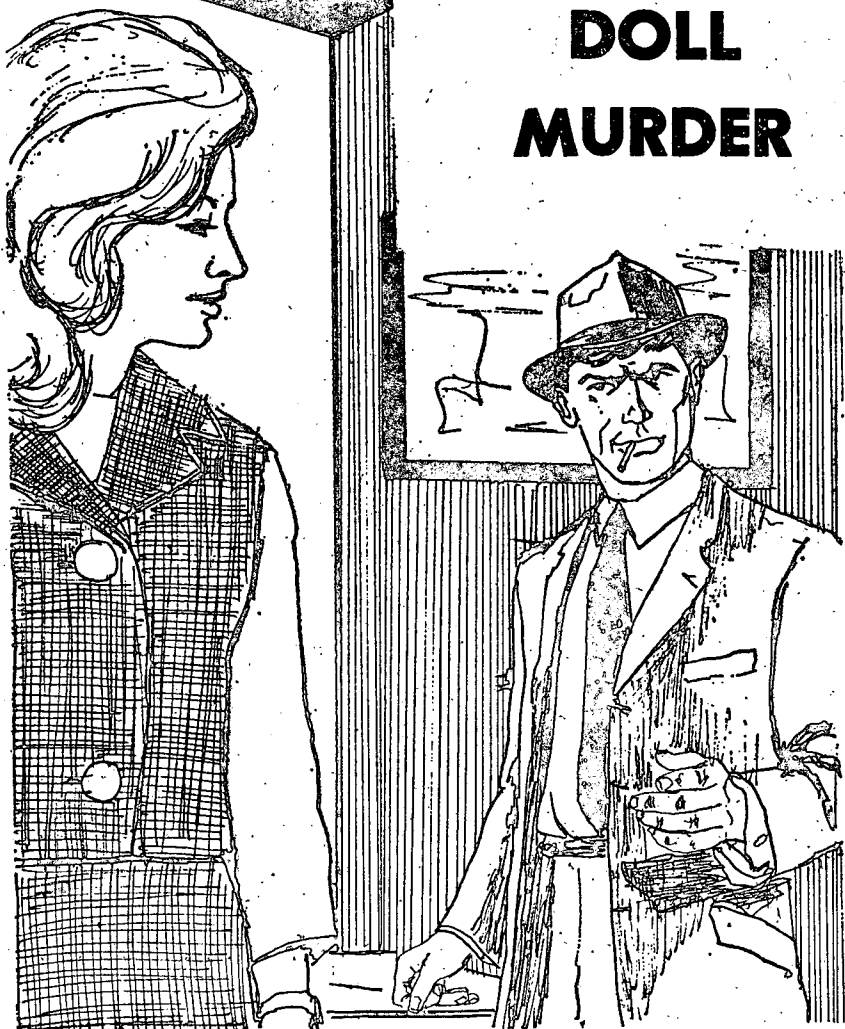
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THE BABY DOLL MURDER



A NEW, COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

Many men had loved her, for Baby Doll Sandra played no favorites. But now she had been in her grave a year—as Mike Shayne faced a web of death to track down the man who had killed her.

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**



MICHAEL SHAYNE arrived late in his office that morning. He had been in New York testifying at a messy extortion trial, and had returned to Miami late and tired. Four accusing eyes turned to stare balefully at him as he walked into his outer office.

"Got back from New York late," he said by way of explanation to his secretary, Lucy Hamilton.

Lucy's brown eyes seemed ready to accept the redhead's explanation. The other pair of eyes, grey and cold as an Alaskan winter dawn, were unimpressed.

"I've been waiting over an hour, Mr. Shayne. My time is quite valuable."

"Then let's not waste any more of it complaining," Shayne said evenly. "Mr.—?"

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"Chandler," the man snapped. "Markham Chandler of Belden, Hall, Hill and Chandler."

"Mr. Chandler is a lawyer, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said.

"Surprise," Shayne said, and nodded to the irate lawyer. "Let's go inside, Mr. Chandler."

Chandler stalked ahead of Shayne into the private office. Shayne gave Lucy a wink, and got a frown of disapproval in return. Lucy was of the opinion that her boss tended to be frivolous at times.

Shayne waved Chandler to a seat and took his own place behind his desk.

"What can I do for you, Counselor?"

Chandler did not answer at once. The lawyer was a tall, slender man in a white suit and black string tie right out of Hollywood's idea of a Southern lawyer, forty years in the past. He had little hair, but Shayne did not think he was as old as he seemed to be, and the grey eyes were a lot less archaic than the clothes.

"You come highly commended," Chandler said at last, his voice low and controlled but carrying both power, confidence and volume. "I asked Chief Will Gentry for the best, most determined and toughest private detective in Miami."

"Will's inclined to overrate his friends," Shayne said drily.

"I hope not, Mr. Shayne," Chandler said. "I have no time to waste, and a most difficult assign-

ment. I trust you believe in justice, no matter for whom, or how dark it may seem?"

"I try," Shayne said. "Why all the preamble? I'm not a jury."

Chandler tented his fingers and pursed his narrow lips. "In a way you are. I have a client, Mr. Shayne, who has confessed to first degree murder. The confession was voluntary, even eager, and the police are rubbing their hands."

"Confessions don't mean much. Is your client crazy?"

"No, neither really nor legally, although he is, in my opinion, highly neurotic and a fool."

"At least," Shayne said. "Or guilty."

"He may well be guilty," Chandler said calmly, "but he has a father who thinks not and who has the money to back up his opinion. At least to the extent of leaving no stone unturned to prove that the boy's confession is a tissue of lies."

Shayne nodded. "What's so difficult about the case, besides a client who confessed?"

"Everything," Chandler said. "The murder occurred over a year ago. The police of Miami Beach have worked on it ever since with absolutely no success. As far as I can determine they have utterly no leads, no suspects to the killer until now. They were, to put it mildly, totally stumped. Not that they did not have a host of suspects initially. They had too many, actually."

"The young lady in question was known for easy virtue, the love of a good time, and the habit of taking up with almost anyone. In addition, she was a well-traveled lady who had lived in many cities prior to coming to Miami Beach to be killed."

Shayne stared at Chandler. The lawyer stared back. The redhead scratched at his chin. A murder over a year old with no leads but a host of suspects, all apparently cleared, and now a confession. And on top of it all the facts Chandler had recited rang a very loud bell to Shayne.

"Sandra Dell," Shayne said, "The Baby Doll Murder."

"I'm afraid so," Chandler said, shaking his head.

"Peter Painter's been after that killer for the year," Shayne said, "and Painter knows his job. The newspapers ran it for months, and half the cranks in Florida confessed."

"Painter appears to believe my client's confession."

Shayne groaned. "She knew more men than Dun and Bradstreet."

"Not quite," Chandler said coldly. "At least, according to the record, which I have for you to read, the real possibilities boiled down to three whose alibies were not absolutely perfect, plus, of course, the entire prowler population of Miami. At least, that was Painter's conclusion."

"Was your client's son one of the three?"

"No. It seems that no one knew he even knew the girl."

"Do you know why Painter seems to believe this confession?"

"No, but I presume it fits the facts better," Chandler said. "Will you accept the case, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne tugged on his ear. "The trail's going to be pretty cold, Counselor. I'm not sure what I can do at this stage. And before I actually accept I'd have to talk to the boy. But I'll accept a day's retainer and at least look into it."

"Very well. That's acceptable."

"Okay. Now how about some names? And get me an appointment to see the boy—alone."

"The boy's name is Nicholas Fredericks. He's nineteen. His father is J. J. Fredericks, the real estate man. Fredericks has instructed me to tell you he will triple your fee if you prove his son is innocent."

"My regular fee is enough," Shayne said drily. "Leave the data you have."

Chandler nodded, opened his briefcase and deposited a thick sheaf of papers on Shayne's desk. The detective looked at the stack bleakly as Chandler left. He lit a cigarette and looked out his window for a time. Then he sighed and started to read the data Chandler had left.

Two hours later he laid down the last document and leaned back.

and studied the ceiling. The facts of The Baby Doll Murder were just about as he remembered them from the long coverage in the newspapers, and from talks with his friend Tim Rourke of *The Miami Daily News*.

Sandra Dell, model and sometime chorus girl, twenty-two years old, and known as the Baby Doll from a series of commercials she had done locally for a sleepwear manufacturer who specialized in very short pajamas, had been found dead on the floor of her living room in a Miami Beach garden apartment.

She had been wearing the same baby doll pajamas she advertised. She had been killed by a single blow from a blunt instrument; she had not been assaulted sexually. She had been found by a cleaning woman at nine in the morning; the medical examiner established time of death as between eleven o'clock and one the night before.

The papers ate it up, and the search was on. Her diary had been found, but, to the sorrow of the newspapers, not released for publication. The stream of men she had dated paraded through Miami Beach Police Headquarters.

After a time only three men were left without alibis that checked out. Two of these had been sweated hard, but finally released for insufficient evidence. The third had never been found—he remained only a name, Mark, in her diary

with no last name. There had been no lead to Mark at all.

This in itself was strange. Sandra Dell had used no last names in her diary, but all the other men had been easily traced through other friends, the descriptions in the diary, and hints as to their work.

But Mark remained an enigma without a trace, and no clues whatsoever were found to give the police a lead. The neighbors had seen nothing after eleven o'clock, except one man in the next apartment building who had seen a shadowy figure running away about twelve o'clock that night.

The door had been locked by a common spring lock; the terrace windows had been open since it was a hot night, and the terrace and garden were fenced by only a low stone wall. Nothing was missing except the murder weapon, which appeared to have been one of a pair of heavy iron candlesticks.

The real problem had been that no really good motive had even been found. The girl owed no money, didn't gamble. No trace of illegal activity had been found; none of her known men seemed to have been especially jealous. All proved they knew that Sandra was no better than she should have been, was just having fun with them, and had no serious intentions with any man. She appeared to have had no enemies; no jealous wives were uncovered.

It had left the police stumped

and with only two really good possibilities: the mysterious Mark, and some casual prowler. Even the sex criminals were just about out, since there had been no attack of any kind.

Shayne stubbed out his cigarette and sighed. The police had hit a blank wall, and he was supposed to breach that wall with a trail a year cold. And against a confession. It was probably impossible, but that was his business.



II

CHIEF OF Miami Beach Detectives Peter Painter looked up and laughed as Shayne came into his office. The dapper little Chief was as pleased as Mike Shayne had ever seen him. Painter fingered his pencil mustache.

"I heard they got you, Shayne. This is going to be a pleasure. I'll enjoy watching you bang your head against the wall."

Painter was so pleased he didn't even frown when Shayne sat down unasked. The redhead lighted a cigarette. Painter smoothed the elegant lapel of his faint pin-stripe blue suit, and began to toy with his cuff-links as he waited for Shayne to begin.

"All right, I'll bite," Shayne said. "What makes you so sure the Fredericks boy is your killer? There wasn't any indication he even knew the girl."

"None at all," Painter agreed.

"We'd never have pegged him. He just walked in and laid himself in our laps."

"Sounds insane to me," Shayne said. "Legally."

"The judge agreed with you. Ran all the tests, teams of head doctors, everything. Nicholas Fredericks is legally as sane as I am. The psychiatrists even say he's a bright, quick, alert, well-educated and perfectly normal kid, barring a certain amount of neurosis, which just about all of us have."

Painter grinned in triumph. Shayne nodded. He had expected that much from what Chandler had told him. And from what the lawyer hadn't mentioned, which was that if the boy was legally insane no one would have needed Shayne.

"You must have had at least a dozen confessions to the crime, Painter," Shayne said. "How come this one is believed?"

Painter rubbed at his mustache. "Normally, Shayne, I wouldn't tell you anything, at least not anything the D.A. will use in court. But this time I don't see how it can hurt us. We believe this confession for two reasons the others didn't have. It fits all the facts we know, including some we didn't give out, and couldn't have been made by someone who wasn't there; and the boy's shoes fit some footprints we found in the garden outside the terrace. Until now they were unidentified."

"All' right. Both those reasons only tend to prove that the Fredericks boy was there that night. They don't prove he killed her."

"He says he did. He knows where the wound was on her head, and the exact position in which we found the body. We know he was there when she was dead, and he says he did it. Period, end of case. Go home, Shayne, and work on something you've got a chance with."

Shayne rubbed at his chin. It looked bad, very bad. Painter had good reason to be pleased. No policeman likes an unsolved case, especially not a murder that flooded the papers with lurid copy and, unsolved, makes the cops look very bad indeed. But, Shayne had taken a retainer, he would finish his promised job.

"First I'll talk to the boy."

"Fine," Painter said. "You go right ahead. Chandler arranged it."

The Chief of Detectives pressed

a button. A sergeant appeared, and Shayne followed him out and along the corridors to the elevator up to the jail cells. On the jail floor he was searched and ushered into a small room where he sat and waited some more. Then a guard took him along through barred doors that clanged behind him like the knell of doom to the cell.

The guard left him locked into the cell and went away. Shayne looked at his client.

"And who, might I ask, are you?" Nicholas Fredericks said.

The boy was small, slender and handsome, almost girlish in his features and soft brown eyes. But there was a controlled power to his movements, and a strength to his eyes that was not girlish. He moved like a young animal not yet sure of the muscles under his skin, and his eyes were bold and open behind their softness. Almost fierce eyes, but eyes that held a kind of pain—a deep and abstract pain you don't often see in the eyes of the young.

"I'm Mike Shayne," Shayne said.

"The private detective?"

"Chandler told you?"

"My father told me, but I didn't believe him."

"Why not?"

"Because there's nothing to detect and my father doesn't throw away money," Nick Fredericks said. "Correction—he throws money but never foolishly. I would have expected him to try to bribe the judge not hire a detective, I

mean, man, I said I killed her, so what do you do for your bucks?"

"Prove you're a liar," Shayne said.

Nicholas Fredericks watched him. "The police believe me."

"All right. Make me believe and I'll leave you to the jury," Shayne said. "I've got no time to waste, either. Tell me about it, all of it."

"Why not just read my confession? It'd save time," Nicholas said.

"I've got time. How'd you meet her? The police didn't know."

Nick laughed. "Coincidence. I only met her that day. We were picketing the draft board. She was there on some publicity stunt. We were manhandled a bit, and I ducked into a doorway and ran right into her. I think I fascinated her like a strange animal."

"Men fascinated her," Shayne said drily. "All men."

Nick nodded. "I guess so, but there was something else, too. I think she wanted to save me, set me straight. She said I looked like too much of a man to be a coward. Well, I told her our protests had nothing to do with cowardice. She laughed at me, said all real men liked to fight and wanted to defend their country."

"Well, I guess she fascinated me too. I mean, I am human, and she was something to look at. She seemed to find me, a peace-protestor, intriguing as hell, you know? An way, she told me to come over to her place and convince her.

That's just the way she put it. She told me to come at ten."

"And you went?"

"I sure did. Wouldn't you?"

Shayne had to admit that he would have. "Go on. You got there at ten."

"No, I got there about ten-thirty," Nick Fredericks said. "I couldn't make up my mind. I got near and then just drove around for a time. I didn't get to her apartment until about ten-thirty. When I did get there I heard talking and saw lights. So I went around to the side and jumped the wall and looked in that open terrace door and windows."

"That's when you left prints in the garden?"

"I guess so. And I guess she'd forgotten about me because she had this fellow with her, and practically nothing on."

"What kind of man, and what did he have on?" Shayne snapped, because there had been no definite indication up until now that anyone had been with Sandra Dell that night, except for the man may be seen running away.

"What does it matter? He left while she was still alive."

"Tell me anyway."

He smiled. "So you can check my story maybe? All right. He was a dark guy, swarthy, not much older than I am, and he wore a grey suit of some shiny material, maybe silk. Anyway, he left and I went in through the terrace win-

dow. She was surprised to see me, but she didn't even put more clothes on. She seemed to think it was all very funny. A ball, she said."

"What time was this?"

"Maybe ten-forty-five," Nick said. "We had drinks, and talked, and necked up a storm. We had a lot of drinks. I'm not much of a drinker and I guess I got drunk. We argued. She called me a lousy pansy and coward because I tried to sell her on what I believe, and I guess I called her a stupid tramp or something. I guess I was boiling. I grabbed her, but she sneered at me and told me to get out. No coward was going to touch her."

Nick stopped. Shayne watched him. Fredericks seemed to be seeing the scene in that apartment over a year ago. Shayne could not tell if he were acting or not. If it was an act it was a good one. He watched Fredericks shudder.

"I—I guess I went crazy when she told me to get out. I hit her. I think she cursed me and tried to scratch me. I grabbed that candlestick and hit her again. She fell. When I tried to get her up I saw she was dead. I ran out. I got in my car and drove home. I didn't even know I still had the candlestick until I was in the car. I threw it into Biscayne Bay.

"I got home about one-thirty. My parents heard me come in. I told them I'd been at a meeting. That's a lie, of course. There wasn't even a meeting that night. I went to

bed. I was safe. No one even knew I knew Sandra. But my conscience bothered me and now I want to clear my conscience and pay for my crime."

Fredericks stopped and sat there looking at Shayne with a faint smile on his lips and an enigmatic expression in his eyes. His story had the clear ring of truth—until that last part about conscience. But that part would sound true to a jury who liked to believe in such sentimental concepts as conscience.

"Nice story," Shayne said. "Now how about what happened?"

Nick's fierce eyes never wavered. "That's the truth. Now maybe you better forget the matter, Mr. Shayne."

"You're no killer, son. You're much too bright for that kind of crime. Tell me you committed a coldly planned murder for a good reason and I might believe you, but don't tell me you killed in such a stupid, emotional way."

Fredericks lay down and turned his head to the wall. "Go away, Mr. Shayne. I made my confession. I'll see you in court."

Shayne watched the young man for another moment. It occurred to him that the confession was pretty clearly intended not to be a first-degree charge, something the D.A. seemed to have missed. Shayne signaled the guard.

As he went out he passed a grinning Peter Painter. In the street he headed straight for his car. He had

one more stop before he made up his mind about Nick Fredericks. He had acted before the boy as if he could not believe the confession, but alone he was not so sure. The youngster was bright; he could be playing a complicated game making the truth seem like a lie to get off.

In his car Shayne looked back to see if it was clear to pull out, and sensed the man who stopped at the right window of his car. An object dropped into the car. Shayne was almost out of the car when the explosion hurled him into a black and red maelstrom of silence.

III

THE FIRST FACE Mike Shayne realized was real and not a dream of violence was the face of Lucy Hamilton. Shayne nodded and grinned. It hurt. He stopped grinning.

"Am I in heaven, Angel, or are you in a hospital?"

"I'm in a hospital, Michael. How do you feel?"

"Like I've been broken on the rack," Shayne said, and moved a little, "but not so bad for all that. Could be worse."

Will Gentry's face looked down. "You're okay, Mike. A lot of scratches and bruises, mostly from kissing the concrete with your face. Nothing broken, no internal injuries."

Shayne winced. "Why am I so



LUCY HAMILTON

sore in the back? All over, like fire?"

"Shrapnel," Tim Rourke said, appearing behind Gentry. "They dug about fifteen small fragments out of your hide, all in the back."

"One big one in the left shoulder," Gentry said. "It looks like a grenade, the bomb boys tell me. Dropped into your car. You got out and missed most of the blast. Did you get a look at the guy who slipped it on you?"

Shayne shook his head and wished he hadn't. "No. A glimpse of a man, nothing more. I couldn't tell you anything. I guess I was lucky. Someone meant it for real?"

"No doubt about it," Gentry said.

"That grenade would have killed you if you'd moved five seconds slower, Mike," Rourke said. "What case are you on?"

Shayne tried a grin. It wasn't so bad. "The Baby Doll circus, Tim.

That should make hot copy. Only there is—"

"The Baby Doll?" Rourke interrupted. "And someone tossed a grenade at you? Is there a gang angle to The Baby Doll?"

"Not that I heard so far," Shayne said grimly, "but maybe there're things we don't know."

"I thought Peter Painter had a confession," Will Gentry said. The Miami Chief of Police was frowning over the stump of his black cigar.

"He has, Will. The kid's parents hired me," Shayne said.

"They think the confession's a phony?" Tim Rourke said.

"So it seems, Tim."

Gentry's face darkened. "What do you think?"

"I'm not sure. The boy's something of a nut, an anti-war peace-picketer, but he's smart as hell as far as I can tell. Maybe he's lying all the way for some reason of his own, or maybe he's lying to cover someone else, or maybe he did it. This attack on me makes me wonder who else is mixed up in the case. Someone who doesn't want me digging into the whole case again, maybe. Someone who'd like to see the Fredericks boy's confession stand."

"But, damn it, Mike, where do you start? The case is over a year old," Gentry said. "I never knew a case that old to ever be solved except by a confession. The trial's dead, gone."

"Someone just warmed the trail

up, Will," Shayne said grimly. "Someone just tipped his hand, and I'm going to find out who and why."

Lucy Hamilton said, "Not for a few days you're not, Michael Shayne. Now all of you out! The doctor said Michael needs rest."

Gentry nodded. "I'll leave a man on your door, Mike, just in case the bomber decides he wants to try again while he's got you on your back."

But the bomber did not try again, and a day later Shayne refused to stay in the hospital a minute longer despite the threats of the doctors and the withering glances of his brown-eyed secretary.

"The trail's cold enough already, Angel," Shayne explained to Lucy. "Have you got the car fixed?"

"No, but I rented one for you while they work on yours."

"You're an angel, Angel," Shayne grinned.

Less than an hour later he was in the rented car and on his way to the Fredericks home. Chandler had visited him in the hospital, and had said the elder Fredericks were more anxious than ever that Shayne work on the case.

It looked like there might be something to work on after all.

IV

THE HOME OF J. J. Fredericks turned out to be an enormous mod-

ern ranch style house that sprawled ostentatiously over a wide area. It was tasteless and gaudy. There was a swimming pool, a double tennis court, a four-car garage, a cabana-dressing cottage at the pool that, Mike Shayne learned later, contained a sauna bath. It was the house of a man who believed that the only thing worth doing was making a great deal of money and spending it.

J. J. Fredericks did not fail to live up to this image. The real estate man let a houseboy open the door, but came instantly when he heard Shayne announce his name.

"Just tell me how much money you need, Shayne, but you clear my boy, heah?" Fredericks announced without preamble.

"Chandler knows my fee," Shayne said, "and I'll do what I can to find the truth."

"The truth?" Fredericks said. "Come inside."

It was an order. Shayne narrowed his grey eyes, but he followed the real estate man into a kind of den where there were no books but two TV sets, a hi-fi system, dictating machines, a mammoth desk, and an expensive reclining chair. Fredericks sat behind the desk. Shayne sat down facing the father.

"Let's get something straight, Shayne," Fredericks said. The businessman took out a cigar and clipped the end and lighted it. He did not offer one to Shayne. It

established an employer-employee relationship. Shayne smiled.

Fredericks saw the smile. The real estate man did not like the smile. "I'm not hiring you to find the truth, right? I don't care about the truth. I don't care who killed that slut. All I want is your proof that Nick didn't kill her. Right?"

"Wrong," Shayne said. At least, it's wrong that you're hiring me to just clear Nick. You can do that if you want to, but you won't hire me to do it."

"Men I hire do what I tell them," Fredericks snapped.

Shayne stood up. "So long, Mr. Fredericks."

He turned and walked to the door.

"Hold it," Fredericks snapped. "What's happening to the world, the country? A man can't tell hired hands anything any more. Damn it, a boss is a boss. Now you sit down. You took a retainer for a day's work and you haven't given me a day's work. It's not my fault if someone throws a bomb at you."

Shayne turned, and laughed. "You're something, aren't you? I'm beginning to understand your son. But okay, I owe you some three or four more hours. I'll use them by telling you some facts."

"You'll tell me nothing! I tell—"

"Shut up," Shayne said, sat down. "What kind of a boss are you who won't listen to men he hires because they're experts?"

"I don't give a damn what you know or who you are. I'm only interested in telling you what I want done. Get that?"

"And I don't care what you want done," Shayne said. "I'm going to tell you what has to be done. All that's going to save your son now is one of two things. Either he recants his confession and fast, before they get to court where a recantation won't matter a damn to the jury, or I find out the truth and bring in the real killer. Now, you think Nick is going to recant?"

For the first time Frederick's facade cracked a little. The real estate man bit his lip. "No. He's a stubborn moron."

"So it's the truth, and I hope it clears the boy."

"You hope!?"

"Maybe he did kill that girl. Did you ever think of that?"

"I don't care if he killed her or not. I—"

Shayne cut him off. "The police care, and they know their job, so you better hope he didn't."

Fredericks bit his lip harder. "I'll make them believe he didn't. I'll prove it."

"Good. You can start by telling me the truth. Nick says he got home about one-thirty that night and you and your wife heard him come in. He says he told you he was at a meeting, but that he wasn't. Is all that true?"

"Of course not. He got home much earlier! My wife will back

me—" Fredericks stopped when he saw Shayne's grey eyes. The real estate man sighed. "Okay, yes, that's what happened. He wasn't at any meeting."

"Where was he?"

"I don't know! That's the thing that makes me boil. I don't know! He laughs at me, the little punk!" Fredericks scowled at the wall. "I raise a boy to be a man, a fighter, and what do I get—a lily-of-the-valley and an idiot!"

"Do you remember what he looked like that night? Was he upset, excited, dishevelled, bloody?"

"I don't know, Shayne. I just heard him come in, called down, and he said he'd been at a meeting. I didn't see him until the next day. I didn't notice anything then. I never can tell what that boy has on his mind."

"Has he acted odd since? I mean, worried, restless, scared, anything like that? Did you notice any change in him the last year?"

"To me he's always odd, way out. I couldn't tell any change if I saw it."

"One more question," Shayne said. "Does he have a girl? Or girls? Has he had many girl friends?"

Fredericks purpled. "Now you listen—"

Shayne exploded. "No! I don't give a damn about your son's character, or your sensitivities and prejudices! I'm trying to find the truth in a year-old murder. Now answer

my questions. What about girls? The truth! I'll check around."

Fredericks grew sullen. "I don't know if he has any girl, or girls now; he barely boards here. He spends all his time with his hippie friends. He had a girl about two years ago, a nice girl. Janet Moser. Her father is in construction and has the right ideas. It looked like the kids would be right, but Nick busted it off."

"And since then you don't know any women he has?"

"No, but he's got 'em, you can bank on that. Those dirty, stupid hippie types, but the women like Nick all right."

"Swell," Shayne said. "You're going to insist your son is so normal he just had to kill Sandra Dell, Fredericks. Why don't you try to understand your son as he is, see his views sometimes?"

"His views? He doesn't have views! Stupid, foreign, criminal ideas that are ruining our country! That's all."

Shayne sighed. "Forget it. One more question. Does Nick, or maybe you, have any gang connections? Racket connections?"

"Certainly not!"

"And you don't know where he really was that night?"

"No," Fredericks said. "I guess that's the real key. Right? If he was somewhere else, what then? Will it help any?"

"It would help to know," Shayne said. "He was obviously at the Dell



woman's place, but the question is when and how long?"

"You mean maybe he left before she was killed?"

"Or got there when she was already dead," Shayne said.

Fredericks nodded. Shayne stood up. At that moment a woman came into the den. She was smaller and thinner and greyer than Fredericks, like a pale shadow of the real estate man. Shayne guessed that this was Mrs. Fredericks, Nick's mother.

"My wife, Agnes," Fredericks said with a strange kind of gruff superiority.

"Mrs. Fredericks," Shayne said, and nodded.

The woman smiled but said nothing. She had a way of always looking toward her husband, as if to know what to think. Shayne got out of there. He was beginning to get a pretty good idea of what young Nick Fredericks was doing, slashing back at his dad in a way

he was sure would both hurt Fredericks and make him feel impotent. But if Nick were lying, he was picking the hard way to hit Dad.

V

MIKE SHAYNE spotted the blue sedan when he pulled away from the gaudy ranch house of the Fredericks? It came out of a driveway about a block away and fell in behind him. There were two men in it. The sedan made no attempt to catch up to him while they were in the side roads.

Shayne made some twists and turns to see what would happen. Twice the blue sedan stuck close. The third time he seemed to have lost it, but he was still among the side roads of the expensive tract. He kept his eyes open as he approached the main highway, and the blue sedan made its appearance just before he got onto the highway.

He was being watched. They had simply let him go once because they knew what entrance to the highway he would have to use.

He made no further attempt to lose his shadowers, but drove back into the city and across the causeway to Miami Beach Police Headquarters.

Peter Painter was working in his office. This time the fashion-plate Chief of Detectives was not so pleased to see Shayne.

"Haven't you given up yet?"

"People who throw grenades at me keep me interested."

"Nothing to do with the Baby Doll affair, believe me. You've made enough enemies over the years."

"True," Shayne agreed. "But I'm not so sure. What about this mystery man, Mark?"

"What about him," Painter snapped. "We don't even know he had any connection. He was a name in her diary, no more."

"Had she made an entry for the day she was killed?"

"No," Painter said.

"What about a young, swarthy man? Does that fit any of your former suspects? Any of her known friends?"

"No, it doesn't," Painter said testily, "and I'm not so sure I believe Fredericks about that."

"You believe only what you want to?"

"I believe what jibes with the facts, Shayne; you know that. The kid's story checks in every detail we can check."

"The trouble is there's a lot you can't check. I'm interested in this swarthy young man no one else has mentioned. One of your witnesses saw a man running away, right?"

Painter scowled. "Yes—about twelve o'clock."

"That's what I remembered. You know, it doesn't jibe, Painter. Nick Fredericks says there was a man there, but that man left before eleven. He himself was there until

almost one, he says. So who ran away about midnight?"

"No one says that the man seen running had any connection to Sandra Dell, Shayne."

Shayne nodded. "Still, it's interesting, especially since it looks like someone doesn't want me to try to clear Nick. I think I'll have a talk with your witness."

"Talk to anyone you damn please, but don't waste my time," Painter snapped, and went back to his paper work.

Shayne went back out, and spotted the blue sedan about a half a block away. That was all right. He'd rather he knew where any potential enemies were, than have them where he couldn't watch them. They followed him when he drove away. As long as he had them spotted, they couldn't do much.

He drove to the garden apartments where Sandra Dell had lived. Her building was a small and luxurious U-shaped affair with a central courtyard and terraces and gardens behind each apartment, separated from the others by low stone walls. After a year her own apartment would have been re-decorated and re-rented, perhaps more than once, and there would be no point examining it.

Instead, Shayne knocked on the door of the neighbor who had reported seeing the man running away that night. A small, slender man of about thirty opened the

door and peered at Shayne over steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Mr. Gerald Klavack?" Shayne asked.

"Yes," the man said.

"My name is Shayne. I'm a private detective," the redhead explained. "I'd like to ask you a few questions if you have the time."

Klavack blinked. "Detective? What kind of questions?"

"About the Baby Doll case, Mr. Klavack. You were a witness at the time."

Shayne thought that the man paled for a moment, but Klavack stepped back politely enough and said, "Again? Has something new happened in the case?"

"You haven't heard about the confession?"

"Confession," Klavack cried. "My goodness, no! You mean they've caught the man who killed that girl?"

Shayne was sure he detected a note of relief in Klavack's voice this time. He decided to leave the man relieved.

"It looks like it. I'm just clearing up some details. It's been a long time," Shayne said.

"Of course, of course. Sit down," Klavack said eagerly.

Shayne had been examining Klavack's apartment. It was small but well-appointed, if a trifle fussy for a man. Its main living room window looked toward the apartment building of Sandra Dell, with a view of the front entrance and of

Sandra Dell's wall. There was no direct view of the dead woman's apartment because a row of hibiscus bushes at the garden wall obscured any sight of her garden or terrace window. Klavack noticed Shayne studying the view.

"As I told the police at the time," Klavack said, "you can see that I can't see into her garden or rooms, but I can see the front entrance clearly."

"You saw the man running from the front entrance?"

"That's right. A smallish man."

"What made you notice? I mean, had you heard screams, a fight, anything like that in Miss Dell's apartment?"

"No, not really. I heard some loud talking, but with Miss Dell that was not unusual. Actually, I mind my own business, Mr. Shayne, and I only noticed the man because he moved, you know? I mean, a running man catches the eye."

"And it was midnight?"

"Almost exactly. You see, I watch the Night Show on TV each night until midnight precisely. I had just gotten up to turn off the set and check my doors when I saw him."

The small man's story rang true enough, and yet . . . The television set was along the right wall of the room. The front entrance of Sandra Dell's apartment building was not visible from it. Klavack had not said he saw the man *while* he was

turning off the TV, and yet . . . There was something about the way the small man told his story. As if to prove that by telling one fact he had told all he had to tell.

Shayne stood up. "Well, thank you, Mr. Klavack. Mind if I poke around your garden? I want to see what Miss Dell's terrace looks like from this side."

"Of course. Go ahead. I don't think much has changed."

Shayne started for the door and stopped. "Oh, you didn't happen to see anyone else that night—say in Miss Dell's garden? Or maybe coming through your garden to get over her wall?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

Shayne nodded thoughtfully. Klavack's living room was laid out in such a way it would have been hard not to notice anyone going over Miss Dell's wall or the wall between her yard and the next yard of her building—which was the way Nick Fredericks said he had gone.

Outside, Shayne walked across Klavack's small yard to the wall that divided it from Miss Dell's yard. The wall was low and easily climbed. There were thick bushes on Klavack's side, and the rows of hibiscus on the dead girl's side. There was a clear view into the terrace french doors from Klavack's side of the wall once inside the bushes so that Shayne could peer under the hibiscus.

Shayne studied the garden of the



Dell girl's apartment. It would have been hard to stand in the garden, at a spot where clear footprints would be left, without being seen from inside even on a dark night. Unless, of course, the people inside were too busy to look out.

Shayne studied the garden wall for signs of anyone having climbed over. But after a year that was pretty hopeless.

He then looked down at the ground inside the bushes. He bent down. There was no mistaking what he saw. An area of the lawn behind the hedge had been stood on often, and regularly, over a fair period of time. It takes time for grass to regrow, and the packed area told its story. Someone had stood habitually in this spot at the wall.

Shayne looked all around. From the spot there was only one clear view—straight into the living room and bedroom of the apartment formerly occupied by Sandra Dell. The detective tugged on his earlobe. He ran through his mind the police reasons for not considering Klavack as a possible suspect:

Gerald Klavack. No connection found between him and Dell girl, no hint of any connection, even neighborly. In his apartment at eleven o'clock when the landlady called to borrow an egg. Landlady would have heard him go out, did not hear. No way of getting over wall without leaving some footprints in Dell girl's garden. No prints found.

Shayne looked down at the packed patch of ground. Klavack looked clear, and yet . . .

Shayne gave it up for the moment, let the thought rest in the back of his mind, where it would find its way out if everything else clicked. He went around Klavack's apartment and out into the street again. He crossed to the next neighbor, who had some view of the Dell yard and entrance.

VI

MRS STELLA DART proved to be a sharp-eyed elderly lady who looked Mike Shayne up and down with frank curiosity and an admiring grin.

"Well, now. You're a fine-look-

ing man, aren't you? And you won't be selling subscriptions."

Shayne smiled. "I'm a private detective, Mrs. Dart."

"Is that so? Do you have a name, young man?"

"Mike Shayne."

"Well, come in, Mr. Shayne. It'll be about poor Sandra, I expect."

Shayne stepped into an immaculate and uncluttered living room. There was none of the fussiness and pack-rat looks that he had seen so often in the apartments of elderly ladies. Shayne turned to face Mrs. Dart.

"You knew Sandra Dell?"

"I should think so. A lively lady she was. Full of life and zest. I always thought she got it in opposition to her parents, decided that life was for living, not praying. That's the way it usually is, right? A person either becomes like her folks, exactly and more so, or goes right off the other way. No compromise. My eldest boy did it. He's a banker, Republican, country club, and Klansman, I think. Opposite of me."

"Her parents are religious?"

"In spades. Some kind of preacher, her father is. Not that she held it against him. She was always nice to him, but she lived her own way."

Shayne looked around Mrs. Dart's apartment. Her front window faced the apartment where Sandra Dell had lived. He could see the front entrance, and part of

her yard. He could also see Klavack's yard, and a lot of the street.

"Did you see anyone suspicious that night, Mrs. Dart?"

She shook her head. "Like I told the police then, I didn't see anyone. Not that I was looking all the time, or even most of the time, but I do see most of what goes on over there."

"You didn't see a man run out about midnight—a smallish man?"

"No, and that's a little funny, because at midnight I was right in this room watching the TV. I'm almost sure I'd have seen someone, because that's the commercial in those night shows and I always sort of look around during commercials. Don't like to miss anything."

"And you saw nothing?"

"No sir. After that I went to bed. My bedroom's in the back, so no chance from there. I didn't even know what had happened until late next day."

"So you saw and heard nothing?"

"Not a thing, except the next day. I told the cops but they weren't interested."

"What did you tell them?"

"That I saw a car acting funny right after the cops all arrived. I mean, the street was full of police cars, and this blue sedan came along going real slow, parked a while, then went on pretty quick when a cop started toward it. I guess the cop was just going to tell the car to move on, so when it went he forgot about it. But I'm sure the

men in the car were watching poor Sandra's apartment."

"A blue sedan? Did you get the license?"

"No. Who thinks of that?"

"Can you describe the men in the car? It was *men*?"

"Yes, three I think, and no, I can't describe them. One thing was kind of strange, though. Call it an impression. Two of the men were in the front seat, and one was in the back. I got the feeling that the important one was the man in the back."

"Why?"

Mrs. Dart frowned. "Well, you'll laugh, but I had a couple of reasons. First, you know how when three people are in a car, like a family or friends, if they're equal they nearly always all sit up front together. It's crazy in a big car, but they do it, nearly always. If one of them is sort of less equal, like a child or an old lady or an acquaintance who isn't really buddy-buddy with the other two, then he usually sits in the back. And when he sits in the back you can tell he's sort of *less* by how he sits. I mean, he sits in a corner, or low down, or kind of stiff, or just sort of out of it. You understand?"

The redhead nodded. "I think so," he said.

"Well, this man didn't sit in the back like that. He sat in the center and he sat sort of *big*— It was like they were driving for him, he was boss. It's a feeling I had. I mean, it

made me think of a rich man and a couple of chauffeurs."

"You said a couple of reasons?"

She nodded. "Now you will laugh. Well, you know all those gangster movies they have on TV now? The big gangster boss always sits in the back and looks real important and mean and lets his boys up front do the work. I got that feeling from that car. The two up front weren't watching the apartment; they were sort of looking around. The driver was holding right onto the wheel. Like they were doing a job of guarding and waiting for orders. Only the one in the back was watching the apartment house."

"Did you tell all this to the police?"

"Hell, no! I told them about the car, but they didn't seem interested. I mean, the car and those men didn't do anything, and the car didn't stop long. I suppose the police thought they were just rubbernecking. Anyway, they weren't interested enough for me to tell them what I told you. About the feeling I had, I mean."

Shayne reflected that Peter Painter was a good detective but not the most tactful of men. The little Chief of Detectives also had a way of making up his mind and then judging by what he had decided.

"That's all you can tell me, then?"

"I guess so," Mrs. Dart said.

"You saw no one lurking around? No one in Miss Dell's garden, or in Mr. Klavack's garden?"

"No, except I saw Klavack out in his garden, of course. He usually is."

"When did you see him?"

"Oh, a couple of times. Around ten or so, and eleven, maybe later. I mean, I don't watch him. I just saw him there a few times. He goes in and out. Is it important?"

"I don't know," Shayne said honestly. Was it important? Klavack had not said he wasn't in his garden. On the other hand the small man had not said he was, and had sort of implied that he was in his living room most of the night.

"I don't see how he could," Mrs. Dart said thoughtfully. "I'm sure Gerald didn't know Sandra at all. He's something of an odd man, but I'm sure he's not the kind who kills someone. Much too wishy-washy."

"Wishy-washy men kill people more than you might think, Mrs. Dart, but Klavack seems to be unconnected," Shayne said. "Did you ever hear her mention anyone named Mark?"

"No, I really didn't know her that well."

"Well, thank you. You've been a help."

Shayne went out to his car. The blue sedan was parked almost out of sight at the corner of a cross street. A man leaned on a lamppost at that corner. The man seemed to be doing nothing. Shayne consid-

ered tackling the man, but with what? He did not have even a glimmering of a pattern yet.

He decided to have some lunch and return to his office before trying the two gentlemen friends of the late Sandra Dell who had been, without really good alibis. Somewhere someone had to have seen something that would give him at least a decent direction—one way or the other for Nick Fredericks.

VII

AFTER HIS LUNCH Mike Shayne walked into his outer office and his grey eyes narrowed instantly. Lucy Hamilton looked up at him with a sharp glance of warning. Shayne stopped just inside the door, and raised a shaggy red eyebrow in question. Lucy nodded at his inner private office door. Her voice was a whisper:

"I don't know, Michael. He says he's the Reverend Oscar Delapool, but I don't like the look of him. His eyes, they—"

The door to Shayne's inner office was flung open. A man stood there. A giant of a man with dilated, fanatic eyes.

"Only the devil whispers!" the man boomed. "Righteous men do not need to fear and whisper!"

Shayne watched the man. Delapool was at least two inches taller than Shayne and forty pounds heavier, and the redhead was a big man. Delapool looked Shayne up

and down and a small sneer curled the big man's lips. He looked more like a fighter sizing an opponent than a minister.

"You wanted to see me," Shayne said. Big as the man was, he would not be in condition, and was at least fifteen years older than Shayne.

"If you are the detective Michael Shayne."

"All right. Step back inside and I'll talk to you."

The big man turned back into the private office and Shayne followed him after a quick signal to Lucy to keep the intercom open and the tape recorder turned on just in case.

Shayne sat down behind his desk. "Sit down, Mr. Delapool, or is it Reverend?"

"It is very Reverend, Mr. Shayne. I am one who ministers to the poor and the weak."

"In what church, Reverend?" the detective asked.

"Ours is a small congregation, Mr. Shayne, but we will grow as the world becomes disenchanted with the bankrupt preaching of the larger churches."

Shayne nodded. "What can I do for you, Reverend?"

"I understand you're investigating the murder of my poor child, that our tragedy is to be raised again," Delapool said.

"You're Sandra Dell's father?" the redhead asked.

"I am. My daughter chose to change her name, poor child. I



think, deep down, she wished to spare her mother and myself from the shame of her life."

"I expect," Shayne said drily. "What do you want with me, Reverend?"

"I have been told by the police that a young man has admitted slaying my daughter. I wonder, then, why you are investigating. Is there some doubt as to this boy's guilt?"

"I think so, or at least his parents do. They've hired me to find out."

"Do you doubt the confession?"

"Maybe."

"You must be sure, Mr. Shayne. That is why I am here, to urge you to find the truth. If there is any

question of payment, I will be glad to help."

"I'm paid," Shayne said.

"Good," Delapool said. "I cannot urge you more to be sure that this boy is the guilty man, Mr. Shayne, that he is not some poor deluded creature who does not know what he is saying. The police inform me that his confession seems genuine to them, but I must be sure."

"I'll do my best, Reverend," Shayne said.

Delapool nodded. "I am sure you will. You have already satisfied yourself that the boy is guilty?"

"Not yet. And I don't know yet that he isn't. I'm still looking," Shayne said.

Delapool nodded. "Then I have one other request. I would like to speak to this boy, perhaps pray with him for guidance."

"You'll have to talk to the police and his lawyer for that. His lawyer is Markham Chandler."

"Of course," Delapool said, and stood up. "Well, thank you, Mr. Shayne. I am reassured that you will do a complete job. I want my daughter's murderer caught, which is perhaps not as Christian as it should be but we are all only human. But I must be sure that no mistake has been made. You will come to me if you do need money, or if perhaps you are asked to stop your search? And I would appreciate knowing anything important you find."

"I'll let you know, Reverend," Shayne said.

Delapool nodded, seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then left the inner office. Shayne lighted a cigarette and watched the big man go. He had the feeling that Delapool wasn't that concerned about his dead daughter, that the big preacher's concern was more with himself, with, maybe, his Christian image.

On the other hand, the Reverend Delapool was a smooth operator. The request to talk to Nick Fredericks might have more behind it than appeared. J. J. Fredericks had a lot of money. It might be worth a big contribution to have the father of the dead girl in Nick's corner.

Shayne picked up the phone receiver. "Get me Tim, Angel."

A few moments later the voice of the elongated reporter was on the line.

"Tim," Shayne said, "could you see what you can get me on the biography, history and reputation of a Reverend Delapool?"

"The Dell girl's old man, Mike? Sure, I'll look him up. And I've got a friend who keeps a file on the religious quacks. I'll see if Delapool appears there."

"Thanks, Tim."

Shayne hung up and got his panama. He took the addresses of the two suspects who had been last cleared a year ago, and went out to his car.

The blue sedan was missing.

That made Shayne look around carefully as he got into his car. But nothing happened.

VIII

GEORGE TIRANA still lived in the plush apartment he had a year ago when the police had not been satisfied with his alibi.

He was a tall, slender man who eyed Mike Shayne coldly in the doorway.

"I heard about you, Shayne, and I've got nothing to say," Tirana said. He watched Shayne with dark, intense eyes.

"I'm just trying to check out a confession, Tirana," Shayne said. "You were with Miss Dell earlier the night she was killed. You drove her home. You left her at about nine-thirty, and went to your job, which was dealing blackjack at a club, right? Only you were gone from the club for about half an hour between eleven and eleven-thirty, and you can't account for it."

"For a lousy half an hour the cops tried to crucify me! They sweated my tail for three days! They turned me and my place and my friends inside out and came up with nothing. All for a half hour, and I'd have had to almost fly from the club to her place and back to do it!"

Shayne nodded. "That's why they had to let you go. I'm not opening up on you, Tirana. I'm just

trying to nail down the confession. Did you go back there at all?"

"No," Tirana said, and then looked straight at Shayne. "If you want to know, and I'll deny it, I was out at a buddy's pad blowing pot. Now you see why I kept shut? I didn't kill her, so I kept shut."

"You were smoking marijuana with friends," Shayne said. "Okay, I buy it, and I keep quiet. Now, can you tell me anything about when you were at her place earlier? Did anyone else show up? Did she act strange?"

"No, except about the kid. She laughed about that."

"What kid?"

"The kid picket she ran into at the draft board. She said he was a real eager little jerk. She said he was supposed to come around, only she figured he'd chicken, and anyway she wouldn't let him in."

Shayne stared at Tirana. "You never mentioned this to the police."

"I didn't mention nothing to the police. Why should I? I was clean, but if I tell about the kid I'm a witness and on the stand a smart defense lawyer'd murder me about that half an hour, right? I mean, on the stand and under oath maybe he puts me in a wringer. Maybe I lie and then they find out where I was and I'm up on perjury. If I tell the truth I bust my friend. No, baby, I didn't say nothing."

"But she did mention a kid? No name?"

"No name."

"What time did she expect him?"

"Around midnight," Tirana said, scowling.

Shayne blinked. Around midnight? "You're sure? Midnight?"

"Yeh, she laughed about that, said the kid would turn into a square pumpkin," Tirana said.

"That's all?"

"That's it, and I didn't say any of it. No one can prove where I was this long after. I'm no witness."

Shayne left the tall man moodily dealing out a slick hand of poker.

Marshall McCoy had moved. It took Shayne most of the afternoon to track down the second 'boy-friend' of Sandra Dell's who had not had a decent alibi. He finally located McCoy in a housing tract in a middle-class section of Miami. McCoy turned white as soon as Shayne mentioned the name Sandra Dell.

"Lay off me, will you?" McCoy whined. "That's old history, please."

"It's current events again," Shayne said bluntly. "Do we talk in the open?"

"Look, I'm married now. I've got a kid; my wife's the nervous type. Just mention Sandra and she goes into hysterics."

"All right. Come out to my car. Tell her I'm something she'll believe."

As if on signal a thin, stringy girl appeared. She had big, manic eyes, and the eyes looked at McCoy and

Shayne with alarm and something like fear.

"Marshall?" she said.

McCoy tried a grin. "This is Mr. Shannon, Lucy. He's an insurance man. He wants to talk about a life-insurance and college for Junior policy. We've talked about having that."

"Insurance?" Lucy McCoy said.

"Omaha Casualty and Life, Mrs. McCoy," Shayne said. "I have some things in my car to show Mr. McCoy."

"I won't be a minute, dear," McCoy said.

The pale, stocky man pushed Shayne quickly down the walk to Shayne's car. Lucy McCoy went back into the house. Shayne did not think she had been fooled. A curtain moved in the living room.

In the car McCoy said, "Now what do you want?"

"Your alibi was that you were with a Lucy Baines from nine o'clock until past three, but she denied it. She tried to change her story when she knew what trouble you were in, but it was too late."

McCoy nodded. "I know. When the police came to me I guessed it was something about Sandra. I'd been with her the night before, when Lucy thought I'd broken with Sandra months before. I just blurted that out about Lucy without thinking. I almost lost her over it except she was pregnant, but she's never gotten over Sandra. I think she still thinks I killed her."

"What was the story they finally believed?"

"No story, the truth. I was driving around trying to think. I knew Lucy was pregnant and expected me to marry her. I knew I wanted Sandra, and didn't care how I had her—marriage, an affair, a mistress, any way. I also knew Sandra was just stringing me. I mean, I'm an accountant. I make one hundred and fifty a week, you know. But I wanted Sandra. So I drove around, thinking. I tried to call Sandra to ask to see her, but I got no answer. I droye around some more and then I finally went home alone. And the police came the next day."

"But they let you go?"

"After a week or more when they couldn't find anything at all to connect me to Sandra for that night."

"Did you ever prove where you were?"

"How could I? I was just driving around," McCoy said bitterly. "They watched me for months, I know. Lucy finally forgave me, mostly because she was pregnant. We got married. I'm happy."

Shayne had heard more convincing statements of happiness. He had the feeling that Marshall McCoy still dreamed of a dead woman. Sandra Dell was probably the most exciting thing that had ever happened to McCoy. Murder had been done for a lot less motive than a jealous rage over a dream.

"What time did you try to call her?"

"About midnight, a little before, I think."

"You're sure? Midnight and there was no answer? You're positive about that?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

"You didn't happen to just drive past her house?"

"No. I thought about it, but at first I couldn't stand to, and after I called and got no answer I was sure she was out with someone else and began to drive around the night spots."

"So you didn't see anyone near her place that night?"

"No."

"What do you know about this Mark, the name in her diary no one could identify?"

"Nothing. She only mentioned him to me the night before she died. She said he was a lovesick nut always hanging around her at work."

Shayne rubbed his gaunt chin. "At work? She said that? He bothered her at work? That's not in her diary or in any of the official transcripts."

McCoy looked puzzled. "Well, maybe she didn't say that, but it just sort of popped into my head now, you know? I mean, I was pretty mixed up at the time, and pretty scared, so maybe I forgot something as small as that. Anyway, the police checked where she worked for any friends. Right?"

"Maybe," Shayne said, "and thanks, McCoy."

Shayne almost pushed the stocky man out and drove off fast with McCoy still standing in the road in front of his small house.

IX

THE SLEEP N' LOUNGE. Sleepwear Company had its business offices in a building not far from Mike Shayne's Flagler Street office. After a short wait, the detective was ushered into the office of the president, J. S. Burnham.

"Sit down, Mr. Shayne," the handsome blond said.

Shayne sat. The blond smiled at his expression.

"It's Jane Sheila Burnham," Miss Burnham said. "I find the J. S. helpful for writing letters, signing papers, etcetera. Men like to deal with men, I've found, especially about sleepwear. They like women in the sleepwear, but they'd rather talk about it to men."

"It's an odd world, Miss Burnham," Shayne said. "You worked with Sandra Dell?"

"Naturally, I handle most of my hiring personally. Miss Dell was good for us for quite a time, publicity and all." The blond woman smiled. "A rather different woman from myself. Very popular with the gentlemen. She modelled on the floor a lot. The buyers loved it, as did our retail customers."

"I expect you're as popular as you want to be," Shayne said.

"Why, Mr. Shayne, how nice of you," Miss Burnham said. "But you didn't come here to flatter me."

"I want to know if you had any employees named Mark about the time Miss Dell was murdered? Maybe a new man."

"That's quite a time ago, Mr. Shayne, but I don't remember any Mark. Our regular personnel changes little, and I know we have no regular man named Mark."

"A young man, maybe almost a boy. Maybe not using that name here?"

"Well, we have runners and stockboys and some apprentices who come and go."

"Do you remember one who was dark and swarthy, just a kid? Perhaps he wore silk suits."

"Mr. Shayne, it's been a year. No, I don't remember one like that, but I'll check my records for you." She pressed a button and asked for the personnel records covering the full year before and just after the date of the Sandra Dell murder.

While they waited Shayne asked about Sandra Dell. "What kind of girl was she, Miss Burnham? Aside from her interest in and for men?"

"That just about covers it," Miss Burnham said. "She was a female object and subject, period. She was also quite a good model,



matter of finding leads, and if you miss one small lead you can miss your whole pattern. Get one small break you didn't have before and the whole case can open up."

"And you're looking for that one small break?"

"I am, and I may even have it," Shayne said.

A secretary appeared then with the records Miss Burnham had requested. The blond executive studied the records for some time. Then she looked up at Shayne and shook her head.

"We never had a Mark on our staff, and none of the names seem to connect with that description," Miss Burnham said. "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne."

"So am I," Shayne said. "It looked like a good lead."

On the street again Shayne decided to check in at his office before his next step. It was only a few blocks and he drove it slowly with his mind on what he had to do next—try again to break down Nick Frederick's confession. He was sure now that it was phony, that Nick hadn't arrived at the girl's apartment until midnight. But he did not know what the truth was, or why the young man insisted on making an obviously false confession.

As he walked into his office Lucy Hamilton nearly jumped on him. "Mr. Chandler called, Michael! He says they have found a witness who clears his client. He

and most useful to me in business."

"Did she have any gangster or racket connections?"

"None I knew of. Of course, she knew so many men I wouldn't be surprised if some of them turned out to be unsavory."

"But you didn't know any?"

"No. I would imagine the police covered that angle thoroughly, wouldn't you?"

Shayne frowned. "You can't be sure. In a case like this it's all a

wants you to go to Painter's office at once."

"What kind of witness?" Shayne snapped.

"Mr. Chandler didn't say. Aren't you excited?"

"I'm excited," Shayne said, but his face betrayed him. "If it's true. I better get over there, Angel. If I'm not back by six o'clock, close up shop and go home. I'll be in touch."

He went back out and down to his car and made the drive across the causeway to Miami Beach as fast as humanly and legally possible.

Peter Painter and Chandler were in Painter's office. They were not alone. A pleasant looking, ruddy little man was seated in the chair next to Painter's desk. Painter did not look happy. Chandler did. The lawyer beamed at Shayne.

"It seems as if we won't be needing your services, Mr. Shayne. No offense to you, but that is very good."

"It's always good when my services aren't needed," Shayne said. He glanced at Painter. "Is it solid, Chief?"

Painter shrugged. "It looks solid. My men are out checking it." The dapper little Chief of Detectives glared at the ruddy little man. "It better check out."

"Someone fill me in," Shayne said.

Chandler said, "This man, An-

drew Carter, came to me a few hours ago. He had heard of young Fredericks' confession."

"How?" Shayne snapped.

"We released it to the papers," Painter said. "Or the D.A. did."

"In any event," Chandler went on, "Mr. Carter came to me and said he didn't know how Nick could confess to the crime when he knew for a fact that Nick was in his bar from about ten thirty to past two o'clock on the night of the murder! He is the bartender at this bar. He knows Nick personally, he has described exactly what Nick told Chief Painter he was wearing on the night of the murder."

Shayne looked at the ruddy man, who smiled cheerfully. "Does anyone else verify the story?"

"That's what my men are checking out," Painter said.

"What does Nick say?" the redhead asked.

"We haven't told him yet," Chandler said, "but what can the young fool say? Perhaps now he'll tell us why he made such a confession and wasted all our time not to mention money."

Shayne scowled at the calm Andrew Carter. "How the devil did Nick know so much about the murder, about how it happened, if he was never at Sandra Dell's apartment as this man says? Besides, I've got a witness who substantiates Nick's story of how he met Sandra Dell, and that they had a date for later that night."

"What witness?" Painter snapped.

"George Tirana," Shayne said. "He told me a few things he didn't tell you, Painter. I can't prove he's telling the truth now, but I think he is."

Chandler swore. "Damn it, Shayne, what side are you on? Besides, Carter doesn't say Nick didn't go there, does he? Only that he couldn't have gone there during the time in which she had to have been killed. Perhaps he did go later and learned what he knows from seeing her after she was killed."

Shayne nodded. "That's possible. Let's ask him. And where's his father?"

"J. J. is on his way," Chandler said. "Naturally, I told him as soon as I brought Carter to Painter."

"Naturally," Shayne said, and he said to Painter, "Let's talk to Nick now. If he admits Carter is right, it'll close the whole thing."

"It'll close nothing," Painter snarled, "but I'll listen to him." Painter pressed his intercom button. "Get Fredericks from his cell and bring him here now."

Before the boy arrived the door burst open and J. J. Fredericks strode in. The real estate man was in a high state of agitation, and glared hatred at Peter Painter.

"So, perhaps now you'll recognize when an unbalanced kid is lying to you? When can I expect you to release my boy? Let me tell

you it better be quick or I'll see there's a lot of trouble."

Painter looked at Chandler. "Tell your client to shut up, Counselor."

"Be quiet, Mr. Fredericks," Chandler said. "Nick confessed. The police had no choice but to do exactly as they did."

J. J. Fredericks scowled but sat down. Andrew Carter had not said a word the entire time. The ruddy little man seemed to be enjoying his role enormously, smiling at everyone like a Cheshire cat.

Nick Fredericks was brought in. The boy looked at his father and Chandler and Shayne with an inscrutable expression. He looked at Carter with curiosity. Painter nodded at Carter.

"You know this man, boy?"

Nick nodded. "Yes, he's Andy Carter, bartender at The Gold Rooster. That's a gin mill some of us go to sometimes."

"When were you there last?"

"Last? I don't know. A few weeks ago."

"How about a year ago?" Painter said. "Can you give me some dates?"

"A year ago?" Nick Fredericks said? "Hell, no, how could I? We were picketing draft boards around then, as I told you. We went into the Rooster a few times around then."

J. J. Fredericks crowed. "There! You see, Carter is telling the truth. Now will you release my boy?"

"Release?" Nick said, stared at Painter and then at his father and Shayne. "Why would you release me? Wait, I've got it! Carter says I was in his bar, right?"

Carter spoke for the first time. "Sure I say you were, Nick. Don't you remember coming in that night about—"

Painter roared. "Shut your mouth, Carter! I'll do all the telling around here." Painter turned to Nick. "Suppose Carter does say you were there, boy, what does it mean? Unless you can give me some other witnesses who saw you."

"Can Carter give you other witnesses?" Nick said.

"I ask the questions," Painter said.

Andrew Carter was sitting up in his seat now. The ruddy man seemed suddenly nervous, no longer smiling as he stared at Nick Fredericks. "Some of your friends must of seen you, Nick."

Nick Fredericks smiled. "Sure they did, but not at The Rooster. I wasn't at The Rooster; not that night." The boy faced Painter. "Some of my friends went to The Rooster that night. They wanted me to go with them. I didn't go because I went to see Sandra Dell. You can ask any of them. The next day they asked me why I hadn't been there. I'll give you their names in private. Andy Carter's lying. My father probably bribed him."

And the boy looked at Carter. "Unless he just mixed up the nights. I was there the night before, I think."

Andrew Carter had lost all his ruddiness. The bartender was pale now. He licked his lips and gave a glance toward J. J. Fredericks, who was staring in a terrible fury at his son.

The boy stared back without a flinch.

Carter wiped his face as Painter and Shayne watched him. Chandler was not watching Carter; the lawyer was staring open-mouthed at J. J. Fredericks.

"Well, Carter?" Painter said, fingering his pencil mustache. "Did you make a mistake? I'll talk to the boy's friends. I'll hold you and Fredericks and Shayne until I do talk to them, if I have to. If I find you're lying, I'll—"

Carter jumped up. "No! I'm not lying, Chief, I swear. Only, well, maybe the kid's right. Yeah, maybe it was the night before. Sure, that's it. I just made a mistake. It was the night before. His friends'll back me up, sure."

Carter sweated and wiped at his face. It had never occurred to the bartender that Nick Fredericks might not want to be saved. Carter glared at J. J. Fredericks with angry eyes. So did Chandler.

"I think I'll have to bow out of this case, Mr. Fredericks," the lawyer said.

Painter said, "You got anything

else to tell us, Carter? I mean, you're sure it was just a mistake?"

Carter licked his lips. "Yeah, Chief, just a mistake, you know? I mean, I wanted to help the kid, I guess I was too eager, you know?"

"I know," Painter said drily. "Okay, take Nick back to his cell. Carter, I'll want you to sign a few statements. The rest of you can leave."

Painter looked straight at J. J. Fredericks. "I don't believe Carter's story now any more than I did at first, Fredericks. I think you put him up to this, and I hope it cost you a bundle. If I can find a way to prove it, I'll throw the book at you. Now get out of here!"

J. J. Fredericks stood and glared hatred at Painter, and at Chandler. The real estate man looked like a man who could have killed at that moment. His hands opened and closed as if wanting to squeeze the thin, red neck of Andrew Carter. Then he turned and left without another word. Chandler followed the real estate man out.

Painter looked at Shayne. "That's one man I'd like to get, Shayne. I wish he was in the cell instead of his son."

Shayne nodded. "He bought Carter; no doubt of it. Only he forgot to tell Carter that Nick wouldn't go along with the story. Carter nearly fainted when he realized he was out on a limb, and Nick wasn't going to back the story."

Painter shook his head. "I don't

get that kid. Why turn down help like that? What's he want, suicide? Sure, we'd have checked it out and found it was all hogwash, but the kid didn't know that for sure. Now he's cooked good."

"I don't know what he wants, but I'm beginning to get an idea. J. J. Fredericks has probably bought the kid out of every scrape in his life. Nick wants to show his father he can't buy everything. Maybe he just wants to stand alone where his father can't help him at all."

"Did he have to kill a girl to do that?"

"Nick didn't kill her, Painter," Shayne said. "This witness was a fake, his father's stupid trick, but Nick didn't kill her."

"In my book he did, and he's playing a damned clever game to get an insanity plea," Painter said.

"No, but I'll wait until I can prove it," Shayne said drily. "Now I want to talk to him."

"Why not?" Painter said.

X

NICK SAT ON the bunk in the cell. His young face smiled faintly at Mike Shayne. "My father can buy anything. Too bad he couldn't find a smarter witness. Poor Carter, he was pretty shocked when I pulled the rug out."

"He didn't expect a kid who's out to commit suicide," Shayne said bluntly. "You better start

thinking about changing your story, Nick. The net's closing. Once you go to trial it'll be hard to change your story."

"Why would I change my story, Mr. Shayne?"

"Because it's not true," Shayne said. "You went there that night, yes, but not until midnight. That was when you had your date with Sandra Dell. You got there and there was no answer, so you went around to the terrace doors and found her dead in the living room. That's when you ran away. It was you the neighbor, Klavack, saw running. The question I want answered is did you really see that swarthy young man in the grey suit or not? If you did, when and where did you see him?"

The boy stood and went to the barred window of the cell. "It's peaceful in here, you know? I feel alive, real. I feel human. A jail is a place for suffering, isn't it? In here men are really suffering, and maybe that's the best place you can find to feel human in."

"Did you see that swarthy man?"

Nick turned and looked at Shayne. "I don't have to do anything in here except think, do I? I can think anything, and say anything, and no policeman is going to hit me with a club. No one is going to try to run me off the streets or out of the parks to silence me. In here there's nothing they can do to stop me."

"You didn't see that man standing over the body," Shayne said, "or you would have told the police. You're a good citizen. You'd have reported a murderer by pure reflex. But if you had seen him in some other way, if you didn't think he was the killer right away, you might have said nothing when you thought about it a day or so later."

Nick lay flat on the bunk. "No one listens, you know, Shayne? No one, least of all a real estate man. I've been talking for years, marching, making speeches. When they don't stop us they just don't listen. They're too busy enjoying the bucks they make because we're rich on the blood of everyone else. Real estate man J. J. Fredericks really enjoys his bucks. He's happy, strong, and it doesn't bother him a damn that he lives on the suffering of the poor and weak."

Shayne watched the boy. He was getting the picture now. Nick Fredericks wanted a platform. The boy wanted to be heard. Nick thought that a murder trial, a bizarre and notorious case that had attracted a great deal of attention already, would give him a platform. Shayne had a sudden mental picture of a yellow-robed monk setting himself on fire. Nick Fredericks was making a gesture in his own way.

"They won't let you make speeches in court, Nick."

"Won't they? How will they stop me? You see, Mr. Shayne,

they'll want to know my motive. And my motive was all I've been trying to say. I killed her because she was a symbol of all I'm against! You see? She was all of it and she laughed at me. She was the result of all the propaganda: money, things, security, fun, have more than anyone else and never think where it comes from. Oh, they'll hear me this time!"

"But you didn't kill her, Nick. Maybe you think you can take it all back after your speech, but you won't be able to: Unless I find the real killer you're going to be found guilty. Is it worth that? Guilty of murder?"

The boy said nothing. He just stared at the ceiling where he lay on the bunk.

"Did you see that swarthy man? Where and when?" Shayne said.

"I saw him," Nick Fredericks said. "Where and when I said."

Shayne watched the boy for another moment, then got up and signaled the guard. Nick never looked at him again. The boy had decided on his course and was going to follow it. Shayne only hoped he had time to save the boy in spite of himself.

He had one strong possibility—he was sure that one man was lying, and had been all along: Klavack, the neighbor.

The sun was low in the evening sky when Shayne came out of headquarters and strode to his car. Klavack had implied that he had



been in his apartment all that night. Shayne did not think Klavack had been. The man had been in his garden. And from his garden maybe he had seen more than he cared to admit.

Shayne saw the car slow as it came near him. It was a small, black sedan. Someone was in the back seat. The low sun glinted on something in the back seat.

Shayne dove for the cover of his car, hit his wounded shoulder, and gritted his teeth against the pain.

Two shots rang out while he was in midair and before he hit.

One kicked up concrete.

The other struck his car.

Shayne rolled under his car and crawled to the street side, his automatic out. He saw the car. A shot slammed into his own car above his head. He raised his automatic. The black sedan raced away.

Shayne had not seen who was in the car. But he had a good idea. His shadows were missing. Anger boiled up in him. He crawled

out from under his car. They had tried twice; they would not give up now.

Shayne got into his car and drove off. It was time to find out who was trying to kill him.

XI

MIKE SHAYNE set his trap carefully. He drove to his office, went up, stayed in the office ten minutes, and slipped his small extra pistol in his belt inside his shirt. He left and went back down to his car. He got in and pulled away slowly. Nothing happened.

Shayne drove slowly and openly to his apartment. He went up, killed another ten minutes, and went back down to his car. He drove off toward the apartment of the late Sandra Dell. He saw them in the rear-view mirror.

The blue sedan was following him again. There were two men in it, both in the front seat.

Shayne drove on across the causeway and back into Miami Beach. He headed away from Police Headquarters and toward a deserted area north of the gaudy strip of hotels. It was an area Shayne knew well.

The blue sedan stayed behind him, just far enough away to keep him in sight while trying to look innocent. The men in that car had not yet realized that they had been spotted. Shayne led them on.

When he reached the empty

country of sand dunes he found the side dirt road he wanted and turned off. He drove on, sure that the blue sedan would not lose him now, and went to the end of the road where a small cabin stood in the fast fading twilight. Shayne parked and got out and walked slowly to the cabin.

The cabin was set in a thick grove of palms and heavy beach brush. Shayne walked slowly enough to be sure that the men in the blue sedan would see him enter the cabin.

Once inside he moved quickly to the small front window and looked back out carefully. The blue sedan was not in sight, but Shayne saw a barely imperceptible movement near the road among the trees.

If they were as professional as they seemed, they would split up and one of them would check the rear of the cabin to be sure there was no rear exit.

Shayne went to a small table and lit a candle that was there. Once it was burning well, and the light would be clear from outside, the red-head walked to a corner of the single room and bent to raise a hidden trapdoor. He dropped through the door and closed it over his head.

He crouched under the house in the dim and hidden darkness. Then he moved to the rear and lay flat behind the lattice work from where he could see the en-

tire rear area out in the twilight. He did not have to wait long.

The man who moved among the palm trees was short and heavy like a fire plug. The man observed the rear for a careful moment, and then bent over some small object. Shayne grinned to himself—they were modern hoods; they had a walkie talkie! That would make his trap even easier.

By now the muscular man at the rear had reported that Shayne was trapped inside the cabin. He, the muscular man, would watch the rear while his companion approached at the front. The man at the front would advance carefully, but his attention would be trained exclusively on the front windows and door.

Shayne crawled to the front under the house. The man in the front was creeping up toward the cabin on schedule. Shayne worked his way to the side and slipped out from under the cabin and into the bushes and the palms.

He moved through the bushes silently in a course opposite to the approach of the man in the front. When he was behind the man he stopped and peered carefully through the brush. The light was almost gone now. The man was crouched low not ten yards away staring hard at the lighted windows of the cabin. Shayne did not hesitate.

The big redhead glided out of the bushes and across the ten

yards as swiftly and silently as a cougar attacking. The man only heard him at the last second.

The man turned, brought his pistol up. In that brief second Shayne saw that he was a thin, emaciated man with the eyes of an addict. Shayne was on him. His big hand caught the man's scrawny throat, and his other hand caught the gun wrist. He arched his back and raised the man off the ground.

The man struggled in his grip. Shayne held on to wrist and throat until he saw the man's bulging eyes go empty and felt his body go limp. Then he dropped the man into the sand and leaned over the walkie-talkie.

In a cracked, urgent voice he cried, "No! Get away! You—"

Then he dropped the walkie-talkie and jumped into the shadow of the cabin. The muscular one from the rear came running around the cabin, gun in hand. He saw his partner in the sand, and reacted faster than Shayne had expected.

The muscular one saw Shayne almost instantly. He shot in the same moment that Shayne shot. He missed. Shayne didn't. The man went over in a twisting fall and hit the sand with his face. The man struggled up, tried to raise his pistol again. He was a tough boy. Shayne kicked the pistol from his hand, kicked him under the chin, and stood breathing heavily, with both gunmen flat on the sand.

When he had his breath back he hauled them into the cabin, one by one. He tied their hands behind them and the skinny one began to come around just as he finished. The muscular one's wound was in the shoulder and nasty, but the man would live if he got to a doctor fairly soon.

The skinny one opened his eyes. He blinked for a time, then looked around slowly and saw Shayne seated on a chair facing him. The man moved his arms and found them tied.

"Who sent you to kill me?" Shayne said quietly.

The skinny man glared, said nothing.

"Why were you sent? Who am I scaring?" Shayne said.

The skinny man spat. "Go to hell."

"They could find you and your buddy floating in the bay."

"Nuts. You legal types don't kill people, Shayne."

"Right, but we can mess them up a lot," Shayne said. "I've got friends. You're going to take a long sentence for attempted murder. I can go easy if you play ball."

"Hell, mister, if we wanted to kill you you'd be long dead."

"You were just scaring me with that grenade and those shots?"

For the first time the skinny hood licked his lips with a certain nervousness. "We was keeping an eye on you, no more, see? That was orders, *don't let Mike Shayne*

out of your sight. No orders about no killing."

"Who gave the orders?"

"Hell, man, how long you think we live if I tell you that? Get off my back, Shayne."

They were not going to talk without persuasion, and the muscular one was awake and groaning with the pain of his wound.

"Doctor! Get me a doc, damn you!"

Shayne nodded. "Okay. Both of you stand up and walk ahead of me. No tricks. There're two of you and I'll shoot quick."

He walked them ahead of him out of the cabin and along the now dark sand to his car. He shoved them both into the back seat, and locked both doors inside. He drove away and stopped at the first telephone he found. He called him Tim Rourke to come and help him.

"Have someone drive you, Tim. I need someone to keep an eye on a pair of rats in my car."

"On my way, Mike," Rourke said.

Twenty minutes later the elongated reporter arrived and got into the front seat beside Shayne. The redhead handed Rourke his pistol. Rourke watched the two men in the back seat while Shayne drove across the causeway and to Miami Police Headquarters. He handed the two gunmen over to Miami Chief Will Gentry.

"You can hold them on an at-

tempted murder charge, Will," Shayne said, "or maybe a gun charge. They probably don't have licenses for those guns."

"I'll hold them," Gentry said. "Do you want a rundown on them, Mike?"

"Right, especially who they work for. Let them make their lawyer-call if they want to. I want to see who comes for them."

"They won't make that call, Mike," Gentry said. "Not these boys. They'll sit here a day or so, and then some lawyer will come. The lawyer won't reveal who sent him, and he won't know anything about your two hoods."

"I know, but maybe we'll get lucky."

In the street again Shayne left Rourke with another promise to tell the reporter as soon as there was any news, and got back into his car to pick up where he had left off when he had been used as a target.

As he drove toward the apartment of the dead Sandra Dell, and her neighbor Mr. Gerald Klavack, he was thinking about what the skinny gunman had said—that they had not tried to kill Shayne. They were professionals. If they had wanted to kill him, as the skinny one had said, they probably would have made a better job of it, at least of the second attack.

But if it wasn't them trying to stop him, who was it?



XII

GERALD KLA VAK blinked at Mike Shayne from behind his steel-rimmed spectacles. The small, slender neighbor was startled to see Shayne.

"Mr. Shayne? Have you something—I mean, do you want something more?"

"Nothing important, just a few more questions I forgot last time," Shayne said.

Klavack hesitated. "Well, of course. Please come in," he said quietly.

Shayne again noted the peculiar neatness of Klavack's living room. It had an air of having been decorated one day ago and never really lived in. Like a show-piece, or a room carefully arranged to hide what really went on inside the head of Gerald Klavack.

"What questions did you have, Mr. Shayne?" Klavack asked.

"Mainly, I want to know how long you spied on Miss Dell," Shayne said bluntly. "I expect you did a lot of looking at the girl who had the apartment before her, too."

Klavack jumped up, red, shaking. "You son-of-a—"

"Knock it off, Klavack, I've seen the marks on the ground at the wall. You were seen wandering around your garden in the dark that night. I figure you did a lot of wandering around your garden at night."

Klavack was white now, but still shaking. "You're a dirty liar! You can't prove—"

"Of course I can't, but I could make life very hot for you. I'd find out sooner or later, Klavack, and then I'd ruin you," Shayne said. He sat down and fixed his grey eyes on the thin man.

"Listen to me, Klavack. I don't think you had anything to do with Sandra Dell's death. I think you're a peeping Tom, and peeping Toms don't kill much. I don't think you would ever have gotten close enough to her to touch her, much less kill her. But I do think you watched her that night, just as you did many other nights, and I think you saw something."

Gerald Klavack sat down slowly. The color was coming back into his face, but his hands still trembled.

"You're a liar," Klavack said, whispered, but there was no conviction in his voice now.

"I'm not going to blow the whistle on you," Shayne said, "That's not my job, and it doesn't interest me. What does interest me is what you might have seen. I think you could have told the police more than you did, but you would have to have given yourself away as a peeping Tom. So you kept quiet. You gave them the man you saw running away just to keep them from asking any more questions. Now, did you see this man running away, and was it about midnight?"

Klavack stared at the floor, at his clenched hands. "Yes. I saw him, and it was about midnight, a little after. But—"

"But?" Shayne snapped.

Klavack's hands twisted like tortured snakes. "I—I am what you said. I always have been. I can't help it. I try to stop, but I just can't. I have to look, see, watch them."

"And you were watching Sandra Dell that night?"

"Yes."

"What did you see? All of it, Klavack. I've got some other stories I can check it against."

Klavack nodded. Already the small man seemed to be more relaxed, as if confession had lifted a weight from him. "I heard her come home and I went to the wall. She was with a man I had seen her with before. A tall, thin young

man, very forward and real confident."

"George Tirana," Shayne said. "When did he leave?"

"About nine-thirty. I—I always wait for them to leave, the men. That's when they, the girls, relax and—"

"Go on. Tirana left. Did you see him again?"

"No. She—she just sat and had a drink in her living room, so I came back inside. Then I heard laughing in her apartment, so I went back to watch."

Klavack's face was drawn, sad. The life of a voyeur was hard, especially if the voyeur was one who lay awake at night wishing he were not what he was.

Shayne prodded quietly, "Yes?"

"She had this boy with her, quite young. I felt sorry for him. He was obviously distraught, tense. He was shaking and she was laughing at him, goading him. She flaunted herself before him. I—had to watch."

"What happened?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. That boy just sat there. Once I thought he was crying. My landlady came to the door about then, and I had to go inside again. After I got rid of her I didn't go out for a time."

Shayne took a breath. "What did this boy look like?"

"He was swarthy, quite young, as I said, and had on some kind of grey suit—silk I think," Klavack said.

Shayne's grey eyes lit up. "Go on. What next?"

"Well, I watched television for a time, and then I heard voices from her apartment again. She sounded angry, her voice was quite cold. I didn't go to look. I had had enough for that night. But then it got very silent. So I couldn't stand it. I was sure she was—was making love. So I went out to the wall and looked through those terrace doors."

Klavack stopped and wiped his face. He was sweating. Shayne watched him. "Go on. What did you see?"

"She was on the floor. Just lying there. The swarthy boy was standing over her. He looked terrible, very strange. There was blood on his face, and he was swaying, moaning like an animal. I ran back into my apartment. I was going to call the police when I realized what I would have to tell them. I couldn't tell them that I hid in the night and watched her!"

"So you did nothing," Shayne said. "What time was this?"

"About eleven-thirty. When I got back to my apartment the night show was just going on."

"You're sure? Eleven-thirty? She was already dead?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Did you see anyone in her garden after that?"

"No, but you know I can't see from here into the garden."

"Then at midnight you saw this

man running away? You hadn't seen him arrive, by any chance?"

"Arrive? But surely the man I saw running was the same swarthy boy?"

"Was he?"

Klavack blinked, seemed to think. "Well, now that you mention it, perhaps not. I simple assumed—"

"But you can't be absolutely sure?"

"No, how could I? It was dark. I only saw a figure running."

Shayne nodded. "One more thing. Had you ever seen that boy before? Had she ever mentioned him?"

"I never spoke to Miss Dell," Klavack said, his eyes staring at the floor. "And I never saw that boy before or since."

"Was there anything special you noticed about him?"

"No, except that he was awfully agitated, and, well, unhappy," Klavack said. "His suit looked very expensive, too. I remember thinking how expensive it looked."

Shayne stood up. "Okay, Klavack, and thanks. I'll keep you out of it if I can. Have you seen a psychiatrist?"

Klavack shrugged helplessly. "Three. Nothing seems to help. I—I don't hurt anyone, Mr. Shayne. If I ever think I might, I'll kill myself."

Shayne could say nothing. He left the man sitting there with his

head down, his eyes staring at his feet as if there was an answer somewhere.

Outside in his car Shayne lit a cigarette and sat back to think. He felt much better. He was pretty sure now that Nick Fredericks had not arrived until after Sandra Dell was dead, had learned what he knew by seeing the dead woman through the terrace doors, and then had run and been seen by Klavack. Which left him with a swarthy young man in a grey silk suit who had been standing over her body a half an hour earlier, and who had left before Nick arrived. No, the silk suit must have left just when Nick arrived because clearly Nick had seen him.

An unhappy boy in an expensive silk suit. Probably the unknown Mark, but who did not work at Sleep 'N Lounge Sleepwear Company despite what McCoy had said about Mark hanging around Sandra at work, and . . .

Shayne sat up straight in his car. *Mark was always hanging around her at work!* The swarthy boy wore an expensive silk suit. A stockboy wouldn't wear an expensive silk suit! Then—

Shayne started his engine and drove off fast.

XIII

AT SLEEP 'N LOUNGE Sleepwear the night doorman told Mike Shayne that no one was in the of-

fice. The doorman was reluctant to give Shayne a number where he could reach Miss Burnham, but persuasion and his license finally got an emergency number out of the man.

Shayne called the number from the first booth he could find. It was an answering service. He gave an urgent message to have Miss Burnham call him back immediately at the booth number. The booth was in a bar, and he went out and ordered a sidecar and waited impatiently.

He was in luck and the booth telephone rang some minutes later. Shayne grabbed it.

"Miss Burnham?"

"Yes," she said. "You sound excited, Mr. Shayne."

"I'm at your office," Shayne said, "could you come down and talk to me?"

"It's not particularly convenient, Mr. Shayne. Can't you talk to me on the telephone?"

"No, and I'll probably have to ask you to look into your records again."

There was a silence. "Oh, all right. Will it take long?"

"I hope not," Shayne said. "I'll be in your lobby."

Shayne finished his sidecar and went back to the lobby of the Sleep 'N Lounge building. Miss Burnham arrived a half an hour later.

She took him up to her office without speaking. Inside her office



she switched on the lights and turned to face Shayne.

"Now, what is all this, Mr. Shayne?"

"A hunch, Miss Burnham," Shayne said. "You said that none of your employees fitted the description I gave you of a young man named Mark."

"Yes," the woman said impatiently.

"What about a customer?"

"A customer?"

"You have a retail showroom, right? Your models do model for customers in that showroom."

"Yes, but we have a strict rule against customers and our girls meeting socially."

"Rules can be broken," Shayne said drily. "It occurred to me that Miss Dell was a girl who liked,

and needed, men with some money. A stock boy would hardly be her speed. But a well-heeled customer would suit her fine."

Miss Burnham seemed to watch Shayne for a moment. Her eyes were not seeing him though; they were thinking. A frown came over her face. She hesitated.

"There was a young man," she said slowly. "Little more than a boy. I remember wondering why he was so interested in ladies' sleepwear. But he bought, and—"

"So interested? He was here a lot?"

"Yes, and he was swarthy, slender, quite handsome, and quite the nervous type."

"Did he show special interest in Sandra Dell?"

She shook her head. "I can't say definitely. It has been over a year. But I do have a peculiar impression at the back of my mind that he did not come back here after she was killed."

"What was his name?"

"I really can't remember," she said slowly.

"Try!"

"Mr. Shayne," she snapped. "A year is a long time in my business, or anyone's for that matter. I couldn't possibly know his name. He didn't come here long or buy big like a buyer, then I'd remember. But—"

"But he did buy?"

"Yes, I said he—" she stopped. "I see. Of course, there will be

bills, receipts. Perhaps if I see his name I'll connect the name and the face. Wait here."

She went away and Shayne lighted a cigarette and paced the office impatiently. The silence of the night offices seemed to make the minutes stretch, but it was less than ten minutes before she returned. She carried a thin file.

"Mark Cutler," she said.

The redhead rubbed at his chin. "You're sure?"

"Fairly sure," she said. "The name connected to the face the instant I saw it. And, Mr. Shayne, he bought at least ten nightgowns over a period of less than two months! I rather doubt that any man, no matter how successful with the ladies, really has use for ten nightgowns in less than two months."

"Do you have an address?" Shayne asked.

"Yes. The Halstead Arms Apartments, Miami Beach, apartment Twelve-C."

"Thanks, Miss Burnham. You may have broken the case wide open."

She stopped him. "One thing, Mr. Shayne. As I recalled, Mr. Mark Cutler made no purchases after some day or two before Miss Dell was killed. I don't think he ever came here again."

Shayne nodded and left the woman moodily rereading her file. He went down and back to his car. He drove across the causeway

again and to the Halstead Arms apartments.

The name on apartment Twelve-C was not Mark Cutler. Shayne was not surprised. A year can be a long time. He rang the bell of the manager. The door buzzed and he walked in and went back along the plush first floor corridor to the rear apartment. The building was an elegant one where only people with considerable money could live.

A tall, distinguished-looking man opened the door of the rear apartment. "Yes?"

Shayne showed his credentials. "I want to ask some questions about a tenant of yours. Probably a former tenant."

"I'll answer what I think I can, Mr. Shayne," the manager said politely. "Which tenant are you interested in? I hope there will be no trouble for the apartment?"

"I hope not," Shayne said. "The tenant is Mark Cutler."

"Cutler?" the manager said, and frowned. "Ah, yes, Twelve-C. A young man, very well-spoken but disturbed, I think. A most nervous and diffident young man, over sensitive. Some trouble with his parents, I believe."

"He's still here? His name isn't—"

"Good gracious, no. He moved out about a year ago. Very strange, too. In fact, that's why I remember him so well. He was a nice, polite boy and an excellent tenant ex-

cept for an occasional disturbance when a man I presume was his father would visit him. Twice I had to call up and ask him to be quieter. He was always very apologetic. I gathered that the noise came largely from the older man."

"Can you describe this older man?"

"Short and heavy-set, rather like a bear. A strong man in all ways, I would say. Very well dressed, but there was something a little uncouth about him despite his clothes. He was, how shall I say, rather menacing. Yes, menacing."

"Cutler," Shayne mused. "You don't know the father's first name?"

"I'm afraid not."

"What was strange about his moving out?"

"Only that I never saw him. He simply vanished. About a week after I had noticed that I hadn't seen him, the older man came and paid his final rent and moved all his things out. It was done very rapidly; the older man brought quite a few men to help him. They did not look like moving men, and they did not have a moving van."

"And you never saw Mark again?"

"Never. All trace of him was gone within hours."

"Did you notice anything, hear anything? Something to give you an idea where Mark was going?"

"No, nothing," the manager

said, and hesitated. "Well, I did notice something that might be significant. I'm quite sure that some of the men who came to move out his effects were carrying weapons."

"Weapons?"

"Guns, pistols," the manager said. "Under their coats."

Shayne rubbed at his chin. "So you have no idea where Mark Cutler went?"

"None at all."

"His mail?"

"If he had any after he left the older man picked it up."

"Do you have an address for the older man?"

"No, he never mentioned it."

"All right, let's try the other end. Do you have any idea where Mark Cutler was before he came to live here? Had he lived here long?"

"No, not too long. Perhaps a year. And I do remember one thing he said. He mentioned a school a few times. I remember because it is a particularly fine school, DeGrasse Academy, and I am hoping to send my son there."

"Where is it?"

"Just north of the city."

"You think Cutler went there?" Shayne probed.

"Oh, yes, I'm quite sure of it."

Shayne thanked the manager. In his car again he lit a cigarette. The elusive Mark was beginning to emerge, bit by bit, from the shadows. Mark now had a last

name; an apartment, and a father who had men who carried guns.

XIV

THE BUILDINGS of DeGrasse Academy were big Gothic piles in the dark night. A high iron fence with great brick columns surrounded the grounds. But there was light in the buildings and the gate was open.

Mike Shayne drove up a long gravel drive to the main building. Inside the door there was a directory that indicated that the office of the headmaster was in the rear of the ground floor. Shayne found it and went in. He was in an outer office that was empty. There was the sound of someone working in the inner office. Shayne went and knocked.

"Come in."

He went in. A grey-haired man with a slightly harried face looked up from his desk. The man seemed startled to see Shayne.

"Yes," the man said, "what can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for the headmaster."

"I'm the headmaster, Mr—?"

"Shayne," he said, "Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective, Mr.—"

"Tolliver. A private detective?"

Shayne showed his credentials and explained his mission. Tolliver looked out his window at the dark night.

"Yes, the Cutler boy. A sad young man. Over sensitive, quite withdrawn. We had him for three years. I must say we did our best with him, but he was not one of my greater triumphs. He would almost come out of his shell, get some feeling of being part of us and close to the other boys, and then that father of his would come up in his mind."

"He had trouble about his father?"

Tolliver snorted. "Trouble is putting it mildly, Mr. Shayne. Every time his mother came to visit him the boy would go into a dive. The father never came, of course. I've seen that boy looking over her shoulder time after time to see if the father was there. He never was. They are separated, of course."

"Who?"

"Why the father and mother. I think she hated the father. Didn't even use his name, of course."

"Cutler isn't the right name?"

"Her name, you see? She used her own name, and gave it to the boy."

"You wouldn't know the father's name, would you?"

"Oh yes, of course. We have to have that for our admission report, you know. Lansky, I think. Yes, that was it: Joseph Lansky. World of difference from Cutler, eh? I often wondered about the mother in that regard."

But Shayne had stopped listen-

ing. All at once a great deal slipped quietly into place. Joe Lansky! It explained the blue sedan and the gunmen and maybe the attempts to kill him. And a sensitive boy with too much money and who did not use his father's name!

Shayne never did hear what else Tolliver said, or see the look on the headmaster's face as Shayne turned and literally ran out to his car. He drove away from the school as fast as he could and did not stop until he had reached Miami Police Headquarters. Gentry was in his office.

"Are those two boys still in jail?" Shayne snapped without even saying hello.

Gentry nodded. "Still with us. Maybe not for long. We had a call from a lawyer. He's on his way down."

"Can I see the skinny one first?"

"Is it important?"

"It is, Will."

"Okay," Gentry said. The Chief buzzed his assistant and gave the orders.

"Thanks, Will," Shayne said, and turned to go, and stopped. "What do you know about Joe Lansky?"

"That I'd like to have him on ice," Gentry said. "Heroin, gambling, numbers, extortion. You name it and Lansky's got a piece of it."

Shayne nodded thoughtfully. He followed the sergeant out and

up to the cells. The skinny hood sat on his bunk with his legs up, looking arrogant. Shayne waited until the guard had locked the cell door and gone.

"I want to see Lansky," Shayne said.

The hood showed his surprise only by a faint stiffening. His eyes barely flickered. His voice did not change at all.

"Who's Lansky?"

Shayne stepped closer, lowered his voice. "Look, I want to talk to Lansky. When that lawyer comes I want you to tell him to tell Lansky that Shayne knows all about it. Now I can talk to Lansky, or I can talk to Chief Gentry and let him find Lansky."

"You bore me, Shayne."

"I won't bore Lansky, and you better give him the message. If you don't, and I have to go to the police, Lansky isn't going to be happy, believe me."

"Tell me what you think you know."

"Don't try to be big, little man," Shayne said. "I talk to Lansky only. I talk in my office. Lansky comes alone. Those are the conditions if he doesn't want everything he's been trying to cover up spread all over the police blotter and the newspapers."

"You know, you could get hurt, Shayne."

"Just tell Lansky," Shayne said. "And tell him I'll know if he breaks any of my conditions."

Shayne turned on his heel and signaled for the guard. He left the skinny man staring after him. Out in the night he got his car and drove straight to his office. In the silent night building he went up and into his private office. He set his automatic on his desk, and the small extra gun in an opened drawer on his right.

He settled to wait with a bottle of good Martel cognac and a tall glass.

XV

IT WAS ALMOST midnight when Mike Shayne heard the elevator in the distance. He listened to the car come up slowly and wheeze to a stop at his floor. He heard the doors close and the elevator start down.

There was no other sound for a full minute. Then footsteps came along the outer corridor toward his door. The footsteps of one man. Shayne listened carefully for any other sounds, such as a noise on the stairway. He heard nothing but the tread of the lone man approaching his door. He heard his outer door open.

He picked up his automatic and aimed it at the inner door. The footsteps came across his outer office and stopped. Then his inner door opened slowly and a man stood there. The man saw Shayne's gun.

"You said alone, Shayne. I came alone."



Shayne watched the man come into the room. The automatic did not seem to scare him. He was a bear of a man, as thick as he was wide, and his face was swarthy, cold, and scarred with the vicious battles of his youth in a dirty world.

"Sit down, Lansky."

"Say your piece, Shayne. I'm not making a social call."

"You tried to have me killed."

"No," Lansky said. "When I try to kill a man, I kill him."

Shayne nodded. "Okay. Let that pass. Where's your son, Lansky."

"Who says I got a son?"

"I say. I say his name is Mark Cutler. I say that's his mother's name. I say that Mark was a boy

with bad psychological troubles and a crush on a girl named Sandra Dell. I say Mark was with her the night she was murdered. I say he was seen over her body. I say he went running to you and you took over then. Where have you hidden him, Lansky?"

Lansky stared at Shayne for a full half minute. Then the bearish gangster slowly walked to a chair and sat down.

"How much do you want, Shayne? How much you going to shake me for to keep quiet?"

"I don't want your money, Lansky."

"Then what's the song and dance about? Why not go to the cops? They'd love to get Joe Lansky's son, and Joe Lansky himself on a withholding evidence rap."

"I just want your story, Lansky, that's all. Did Mark kill Sandra Dell?"

"How the hell do I know? What do I care? The tramp had it coming to her, and I don't care about the punk kid in jail now. He confessed, right? Let him take the rap."

"Not if he didn't do it. And not Mark if he didn't. Tell me your story."

Lansky didn't move for some time. Then the burly racketeer reached into his pocket and came out with a cigar. Lansky lit the cigar carefully. "Mark come to me about one o'clock that night. I knew he was in bad trouble. He hadn't come to me for ten years. I

never wanted him around me, you understand? His mother, she hates me, and I wanted Mark to have a chance to be legit."

"How did he feel about it, Lansky? Maybe he wanted a father, no matter who?"

"Maybe," Lansky said. "What do I know? I'm just a punk. How did I know the kid had a thing about me? Only that night he come to me and he was bad, real bad."

"How do you mean, bad?"

"Nuts, psycho, off his rocker. He fell all over me, he was hysterical, yeah. He babbled all over the place about father, dad, where was a child to go, and crap like that. I mean, I always knew he was a soft kid, you know? The docs they said he was sensitive, gentle. Christ! The son of Joe Lansky's sensitive, gentle!"

"Go on. He came to you hysterical."

"He didn't make much sense, but he did talk about this dead dame. I knew he'd been playing around with the tramp. So next day I go have a look. I see the cops all over her place so I know she's dead all right. I go home. I figure I get the story out of Mark, and then hide him out. Only—"

"Only?"

Lansky's face was haunted. "Only he'd flipped all the way. Gone, in dreamland. What do I do? I don't care if he killed that broad or not. I got a wife hates me already because I'm what I am. I

got two other kids, girls. If I turn him in, what chance does he have? The son of Joe Lansky and a psycho on top? If he didn't kill her how do I prove it, and the publicity it's as bad. And that dame deserved what she got so I don't care if her killer gets away."

"Where is he, Lansky? In a sanatarium?"

Lansky nodded. "Yeah, just south of town. He never come out of it. He just sits there all day and stares at nothing, or maybe sort of babbles about me and how evil I am, or sometimes he throws a violent wingding and screams he wants all fathers to die!" Lansky stopped and looked at Shayne from a pain so deep Shayne was almost sorry for the racketeer.

"I ain't no saint, Shayne, only I loved my son. I thought I was doing right when I cut him off from me and all I'm mixed up in. How did I know I was wrong? His mother didn't know. None of us knew what we was doing to that boy."

Lansky buried his face in his hands. Now Shayne was sorry for the man. Maybe Lansky was a killer and a maimer, but he was a father who had made a mistake by trying to do the right thing. Maybe the only time in Lansky's life he had thought of anything or anyone but himself, and by trying to save his son from himself he had destroyed the boy.

It was a lot to inflict on a man, even Joe Lansky.

"I want to see him, Joe," Shayne said.

Lansky's head jerked up. "No!"

"Yes. I've got a funny hunch, an idea. Maybe I can even help Mark."

"Why would you care about my boy?"

"Because he's human, and so am I, I hope."

Lansky stared. The cigar had gone out unnoticed. Lansky was struggling deep inside his shrewd, cunning but not too smart mind.

The gangster stood up. "Okay. I'll pick you up six o'clock in the morning. Be ready."

"Are your boys out of the can?"

"They're out. You going to push charges?"

"I don't know yet."

"Fair enough. Only, Shayne—remember that if I want to kill a man I do it. My boys don't miss."

Lansky went out without looking back. Shayne smoked one more cigarette before he went home to bed. He didn't sleep well. An idea was buzzing around in his mind. If he was right, he was going to have a hard time proving it.

XVI

JOE LANSKY came alone. Neither Shayne nor the racketeer spoke all the way to the sanitarium. It was one of those modern factories of pain where everything looked like a country club until you noticed that none of the "guests" seemed

to smile or notice anything much around them. They just wandered those spacious lawns, and men in white uniforms wandered close behind them.

The doctor took them straight to the room of Mark Lansky, alias Cutler. The room was a white cell with barred windows and soft floors and walls and nothing in it with hard corners or an edge.

"The boy's problem is an accute schizophrenic-paranoid state, centering on his father," the doctor explained as they walked. "There's some kind of massive guilt buried in him. I can't permit his father to see him at all. It always makes the boy violent or catatonic. Just now he is quiet and will talk at times. As for you, Mr. Shayne, I can't give you long."

"I may not need long, Doctor. I'm hoping, just hoping, I can help him. I've got a hunch I know what's at the heart of it."

"Be careful, Mr. Shayne. I want to release the boy from his guilt, too, but the shock could be dangerous."

"I'll be careful."

The doctor nodded, not convinced. But he took Mike Shayne into the room, and together they faced the boy. Shayne studied Mark. The boy was slender, swarthy, just about twenty now.

Mark turned his face to look at the doctor, and then at Shayne. The boy's eyebrows fluttered as he looked at Shayne. He looked like a

suddenly frightened small animal.

"Hello, Mark," the doctor said. "I've brought a friend to talk to you."

The boy said nothing.

"I was a friend of Sandra's, Mark," Shayne said.

The boy blinked rapidly and suddenly turned his head away, his knuckles white where they gripped the edge of his bed. A low moan escaped the boy, and the doctor looked sharply at Shayne.

"You saw him, didn't you, Mark? You saw him kill her," Shayne said. "You were there, in the bedroom! You heard them argue, and then you saw him kill her."

The boy moaned, thrashed on the bed. The doctor jumped up instantly.

"Mr. Shayne!" the doctor cried, "you better—"

"You saw your father kill her!" Shayne said. "You heard it all, and you came out and she was dead, and you knew he had killed her. They're all killers, Mark, right?"

It was then that the great groan tore from the boy's lungs, and he turned on the bed to face Shayne and the doctor. "Yes, all of them! They kill you, destroy you! Ashamed of you, that's what they are. They hide you and take your name and they're ashamed of you and they kill you!"

The boy broke down into deep, shuddering sobs where he lay on the bed. "Slut, he called her, filthy sinner, and he killed her with that

candlestick! All killers, all of them!"

The sobs continued to wrack the boy's body. The doctor looked at the sobbing boy, and then at Shayne.

"You've done it, Mr. Shayne! He's broken out. I could have you whipped for your method, but you've done it!"

"You mean he's all right now?"

"My God, no! Not anywhere near all right, but I can make him all right now. It'll take time, but I can save him now," the doctor said, and then watched Shayne. "You know you can't really believe what he said about his father being a murderer. It was a fixation, a delusion. Figurative killer, his killer, you see?"

"I know, Doc," Shayne said. "But I believe him. You see, he did see a murder, and that's what triggered his breakdown. He saw this girl he wanted killed, or he heard it at least, and he knew who had done it! He knows who killed her."

"He won't be able to testify for a long time, perhaps never. When he is well he may have blotted the whole thing out."

"I know, Doc, but the killer doesn't."

"You know the killer?"

"I had a hunch, and Mark just told me," Shayne said.

"You mean his father?" the Doctor said. "But I just told you that—"

"His father killed her, Doc, that's what his mind told him out

of what he heard and saw," Shayne said.

The redhead left the room. In the corridor he saw Joe Lansky, as white as chalk. The racketeer stepped toward Shayne.

"If you—" Lansky began. "I heard screams. I—"

"The doctor says Mark's going to come out of it now," Shayne said. "The boy's going to be all right."

Lansky blinked. "All right? You mean, he ain't crazy no more?"

"That's what the doc said," Shayne said. "And Lansky, he didn't kill the girl, either."

Lansky hardly heard the last. "He's gonna be okay? You brought him back? You?"

For a minute Shayne thought that the racketeer was going to kiss him. Then Lansky spun on his heel and started toward his son's room. Over his shoulder he croaked out three words:

"Thanks, Shayne . . . thanks."

XVII

MIKE SHAYNE parked in front of the old frame house that sat among a grove of willows on the western edge of Miami. A neon cross was above the door, turned off now in the sunny morning.

The Reverend Delapool himself opened the door. The big man looked Shayne up and down, and then Delapool's eyes seemed to search over Shayne's shoulder.

There was a small, black sedan parked in Delapool's garage.

"Can I come in, Delapool?"

The big man stepped back. Shayne walked into a dark old hallway. Delapool led him into a shabby and faintly musty living room. Across the hallway from the living room was a double door that stood open to reveal a makeshift chapel with rows of folding chairs and a raised platform in front.

Tim Rourke had never made his report to Shayne on Delapool, but that didn't matter now.

"Have you brought me news, Mr. Shayne?" Delapool said.

"I've brought news," Shayne said.

"Sit down then, and tell me about it. I suppose it means that you have located the slayer of my poor daughter?"

"I'll stand," Shayne said. "Yes, I've located the killer of your daughter."

Delapool nodded. "I see. I thought from the beginning that you were a skilled man. You have found the evidence to free that boy who confessed? Or have you, perhaps, found that he was her killer after all?"

"You know he wasn't her killer, Delapool," Shayne said.

Delapool raised a heavy eyebrow. "I know?"

"That's right. Why did you go there that night? To lecture her for her sins? To borrow money? What did she do, laugh at you?"

Delapool turned and began to pace slowly. "You imply that I killed my own daughter?"

"I don't imply, I know," Shayne said. "I have a witness."

Delapool stopped as if shot. He did not turn. "A witness?"

"A young man named Mark Cutler. He was in the apartment, in the bedroom. He heard you argue with Sandra, call her a slut and a sinner and probably a lot of other things. He heard you hit her with that candlestick. After you ran out, he came out and saw that she was dead."

Delapool still did not turn. "Why hasn't this Cutler come forth with this fantastic story before this?"

"His father is a gangster. He didn't want to be involved."

"But now he will testify?"

"Now he will. Besides, I'm sure we'll find grenades in this house that match the one used to try to kill me, and probably the gun you shot at me with."

Delapool turned. There was a gun in his hand. But there was a gun in Shayne's hand, too. The two guns roared almost at the same instant. But not quite at the same instant. Shayne's shot came first by a split second. It was enough. Delapool went over as if poleaxed by Shayne's .45. Delapool's bullet hit only air and then the far wall.

Shayne bent over the fallen man. Delapool would live. The bullet had shattered the big man's shoulder.

Shayne heard a sound behind him. He whirled and came up half crouched and with his pistol ready. A woman stood looking down at Delapool:

"He made me help him," the woman said. "I am his wife. I had to help him. He wanted to kill you. He was afraid of you. He went that night to bring Sandra home, to force her to give up her evil ways. She laughed at him; she used foul language. He cursed her, and she still laughed. She called him a fake, a hypocrite, and he lost his head and struck her with the candlestick and killed her."

"He was sure that no one knew he had been there. The police never came. No one solved her death. Then this boy confessed. But you came along and he was afraid of what you might find if you worked hard, so he tried to kill you."

"He won't kill anyone else," Shayne said.

"No," Mrs. Delapool said. "I have the candlestick. I kept it."

Shayne called an ambulance and Will Gentry.

Peter Painter was furious that Mike Shayne had solved the case and that Will Gentry had made the arrest.

Shayne explained to the dapper Chief of Detectives. "Mark Cutler knew who had killed her, but it sent him into a mental collapse. It was her father, see? Her father killed her, and he had always felt 'killed'

by his father. It drove him into a psycho state."

Nick Fredericks did not thank the redheaded detective.

"I'll have to find another way to be heard."

Painter growled. "How did you know what Mark Cutler looked like, Fredericks?"

"Shayne was right," the young man said. "I got there just about midnight, maybe ten minutes be-

fore, and I saw Cutler leave the building. When I found her dead I ran. I was scared then."

Painter swore he would find something to charge both the Fredericks with. J. J. Fredericks paid Shayne a good fee.

A week later an anonymous gift of five thousand dollars in cash arrived in Mike Shayne's office. Shayne donated the money to a mental health clinic.

COMPLETE—NEXT MONTH—

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There was no one in that dark lane.
No one but a man—and a murder plan



TELL TALE

by GEORGE BELLEFONTAINE

MAGGIE GRIMSBY'S tall, shapeless body shivered as she stepped from within the brightness and warmth of the community hall. Her eyes were drawn reluctantly toward the pale moon, shrouded with creature-like clouds. Finally she turned angrily toward her three companions.

"You told me you were all going

home right after the last game," she said.

"For cryin' out loud," Mrs. Ethel Hammond, Maggie's next door neighbor, said with a sigh. "You've been walking home alone for years. What's so different about tonight?"

"I told you all before," Maggie said quickly, "that someone has been watching me—all week. I wouldn't have come tonight except you said you were going right home."

"For heaven's sake, Maggie," Mrs. Hammond sighed. "I didn't think I was going to win at bingo tonight. I want to celebrate at the diner."

"Come on, Maggie," one of the other ladies coaxed. "Just this once. We all know how your Albert is, but—"

"No," Maggie said firmly. "You know I can't."

"No one'll bother you walking home," Ethel Hammond said. "Nobody's watching you. That's your imagination."

Maggie said, "Okay, I'll walk home alone and you'll all be sorry." She started away.

"Wait!" Mrs. Hammond said. "Do you have any news for us to chat about? Another hot item like that Bartlett thing and we'll have to give you some kind of an award."

"I know all kinds of gossip," Maggie said and continued on down the dark sidewalk. "You'll

just have to wait until tomorrow morning over coffee."

"Well, keep your eyes open on Lover's Lane," Mrs. Hammond called out. "Never know whose husband you might see with whose wife in a parked car."

Maggie knew they were kidding her. She ignored them and quickened her pace. Let them laugh at her. She lifted her pointed chin high, proud that she knew more secrets about more people than anyone else in the neighborhood.

When she reached the first street light, she glanced at her wristwatch and caught her breath. She had wasted five minutes arguing with her friends. She would be late and Albert would be furious.

Although her husband's temper sometimes frightened her, there was something about his possessiveness and his jealousy that made her feel good all over—especially his jealousy.

Once they had been walking down a busy street, and a few teenagers mumbled something while looking in Maggie's direction. Albert went back and there was a terrible fight. One boy had to be taken to a hospital and another had his nose broken. Albert had to go to court over that.

Maggie had never given her husband any cause to be jealous. She guessed it was just in his make-up. As for his possessiveness—well that was trying at times. He allowed her one night out a week to

play bingo. When she went shopping, he went. When she had to go to the doctor or the dentist, she had to account for every minute of her time. Yes, quite trying at times, but she loved her Albert.

Now, as she turned up Cherry Lane, she knew this would be one of those trying nights and she would have to get Mrs. Hammond to verify her excuse for being late.

There were no lights and no houses on Cherry Lane, just a dirt road lined with thick trees. The original fear returned once more as Maggie heard the wind rustle the leaves. Was it the wind? She stopped—listened. No sounds now. Who would be watching her?

"I'm not afraid," she told herself aloud. "I've taken this short cut for the past six years alone and I was never afraid. Yes, maybe they're right—my imagination. I have no reason to be afraid."

Suddenly the moon broke free and the dark street brightened. That's when she saw the car, about two hundred yards ahead. She continued on toward it, slowly, her eyes straining to see if the car was occupied. It wasn't.

Just as she reached the car, its door flew open, blocking her path. A rough hand shot out, gripped her wrist. She struggled and cried out, but the hand was strong.

"Get in," a man's voice commanded.

When Maggie saw the gun, she obeyed meekly. "You!" she cried.

"Tom Bartlett. But I thought you moved—"

"Yes, but I haven't forgot." He reached across her and slammed the car door shut, then shoved the gun up near Maggie's throat. "Don't scream or struggle or I'll pull the trigger."

"I—I won't."

She stared wide-eyed at Bartlett's handsome young face, puzzled by the hatred she saw there.

"I thought about this for a long time." His voice trembled. "But my Peggy is gone and it was your wagging tongue that caused it."

"Me?"

"Think back, Mrs. Grimsby—back to a certain Thursday night two months ago." He pressed the gun hard against her neck. "Think!"

Maggie's flesh quivered beneath the pressure of cold steel. "Yes—yes. I'm trying."

"Surely you haven't forgotten how you were walking up this very road and how you saw a car parked and me inside with a woman. It wasn't my wife, was it, Mrs. Grimsby?"

Maggie remembered but she lied, "I saw nothing. It must have been some—"

"So you wagged your tongue to your friends and a few nights later it got back to Peggy. I tried to explain but she got in the car and drove off. It was raining that night—"

Maggie Grimsby saw the pain in

his eyes and she felt the pressure of the gun lighten and move slightly as his hand trembled.

"The car crashed," he stammered. "And she—she—"

Maggie recalled the excitement of that night in the neighborhood. The police cars; the news of Mrs. Bartlett's death. Some said it was an accident, but Maggie, along with Mrs. Hammond, decided that Peggy Bartlett couldn't stand the shame and humiliation of betrayal and had committed suicide.

"If only she had listened to me. It was over between me and that other woman. That's why I was seeing her that night. Oh, Peg, why didn't you listen?"

"Please let me go?" Maggie pleaded softly.

"Sometimes a man can do stupid things and regret them the rest of his life. I loved Peg."

"Yes—yes. Now can I go?" she asked.

His grief apparently forgotten now, he turned on Maggie with renewed hatred. "You killed her. As sure as you—"

Women's voices. Laughter. Maggie's heart pounded hopefully.

Tom Bartlett grabbed her roughly and pulled her close. She clawed at him as he kissed her hard on the lips.

Women's voices. Laughter. Closer. Silence. Laughter again, trailing off—gone.

Bartlett pushed her away and wiped at his mouth as if it had been



contaminated. Slowly, he cocked the gun and steadied his hand.

"No! Please don't kill me," Maggie sobbed. "I—I'm sorry. Please don't hurt me."

There was a long silence except for Maggie's sobbing. Finally she managed to open her eyes and she saw Bartlett leaning back, the gun dangling in his limp hand, his eyes confused.

"I—I thought killing you was the only way. But I can't do it."

Maggie sighed and edged her trembling body closer to the door.

"Yes, go on," he half whispered. "I'm not going to hurt you now."

Maggie opened the car door.

"Just remember this, Mrs. Grimsby, you were responsible for my wife's death and—"

Maggie got out quickly and started to run.

Her blood raced angrily to her brain. She'd get even with that Tom Bartlett. Imagine, blaming her for his wife's death. She'd call the police and tell—No! What about Albert? Hadn't he warned her about

gossiping? And would he really believe what had taken place tonight? Not her Albert.

And she was terribly late.

When she arrived home she made up a story about becoming ill and fainting and that some kind lady in a car had stopped and helped her. Maggie couldn't be sure she had convinced Albert with her story, for he looked at her strangely and she sensed that familiar old suspicion of his. He forced her to tell the story over and over again and finally he allowed her to go to bed.

The next morning Maggie telephoned Ethel Hammond and asked her over for coffee. Mrs. Hammond declined rudely, as did the others when Maggie called them, and for the next three days Maggie drank her coffee alone—bewildered at being snubbed.

Maggie prepared hash for that night's meal, but Albert was late. She waited until eight o'clock and telephoned his office but there was no answer. She paced the living room anxiously and about an hour later she heard the front door open and slam shut.

"Albert? Is that you?"

No answer.

Maggie began to tremble. She relaxed for a moment when Albert appeared in the doorway, then she saw his eyes. They were bloodshot and his lips were twisted angrily.

"Have you been drinking?"

He just stared at her, his huge

body bent slightly, huge hands opening and closing quickly.

"I warned you," he said, "what would happen to you if you ever —" He lowered his eyes and shook his head as if he couldn't believe what ever it was he was angry about.

"What did I do?"

"You know damn well what you did." His eyes were on her once more—angry eyes. "If I can't have you, no one can." He whipped off his necktie, stretched it taut.

Maggie had seen this kind of anger before and someone had always been hurt before it was satiated. Presently, she backed away from him, but soon there was the wall and finally no escape from his fast hands as he knotted the tie about her thin neck.

"Please—what did I do?" she gasped, her small hands clawing desperately at his.

"You lied. You weren't at any bingo last Thursday night. You were in a car with another man. He was kissing you."

"No—"

"I had to hear it from Frank Hammond at the office. Me, betrayed by the wife I loved—"

As the room grew darker, Maggie remembered how Tom Bartlett had grabbed and kissed her and she recalled the laughter of women as they walked past the car, and then, in her final moments as Albert tightened the tie, Maggie could only think of Mrs. Hammond.

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From the Panhandle to Florida, all through the depression-riddled Southland, Ma Barker and her hell-spawned brood were killing and looting and terrorizing the land. Any man's woman, any cop's killer, dumpy, squat Ma Barker lived to kill—and killed to live. Here is—

ARIZONA “MA” BARKER: THE DEVIL’S DAUGHTER

by DAVID MAZROFF

IT WAS NOT yet dawn of January 16, 1935. A mist hung over Lake Weir, Florida, and the big white house at Oklawaha, a small resort about twenty miles south-east of Ocala, the seat of Marion County.

Inside the house were Ma Barker and her son Fred. The fires of hate, violence, robbery, and murder in which these two had engaged for years were about to be put out forever.

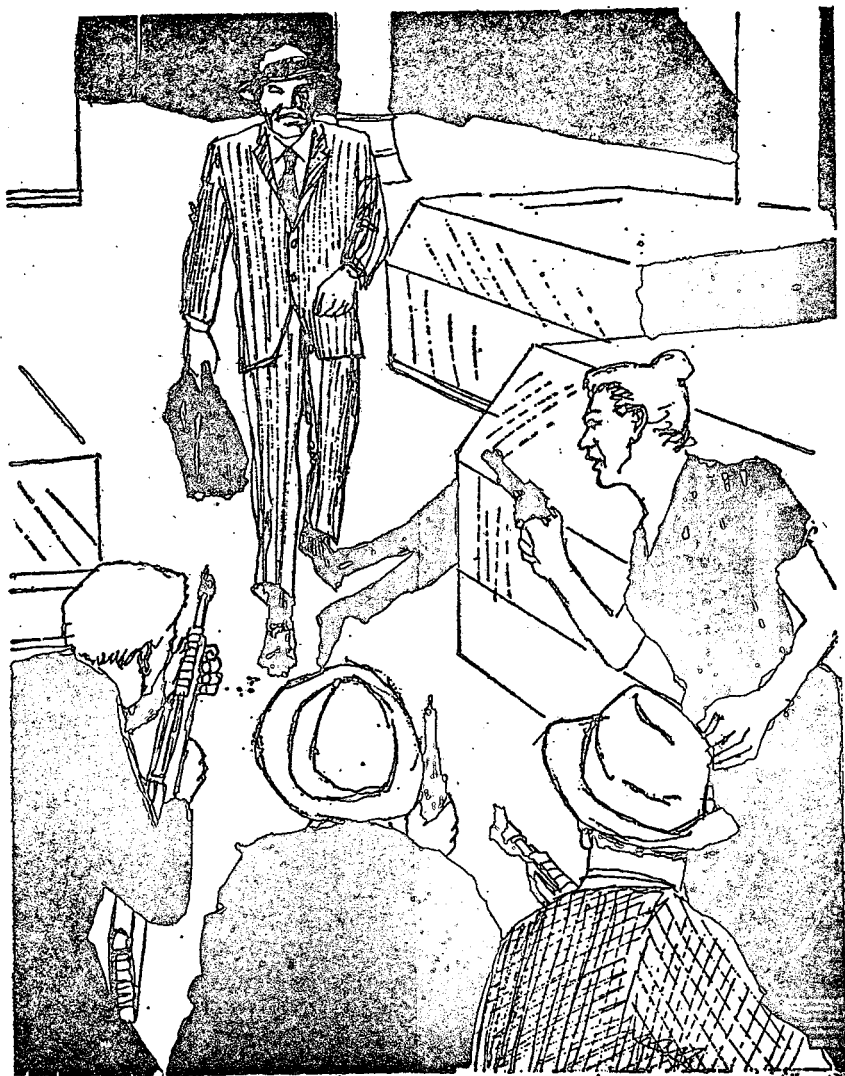
The FBI agents moved stealthily through the mist, faint shadows in a veiling darkness, machine guns in hands, their eyes straining

against the dimness. To the east, a finger of light pierced the mist momentarily and then was gone.

It was a little before six. The sun would rise shortly, and then the agents would be exposed to the merciless light and to the automatic weapons they knew were in the house and which Ma Barker and Fred would use, for killing was their way of life, and who they killed mattered not one whit to them. With their safety, their very lives, in jeopardy, they would slaughter a city.

In the next few minutes the house was completely surrounded.

A TRUE CRIME Story of America's Most Evil Woman



E. J. Connelley of the Cincinnati office of the FBI, in charge of the FBI detail, stepped out from behind a tree.

"Fred! Ma Barker! Come out!" Connelley shouted. "One at a time. With your hands up. We are FBI agents!"

Connelley waited several minutes but no answer came from inside the house. He repeated the command.

"Come out, Fred. You first. You won't be hurt if you come out with your hands up!"

Still no answer. The shades were drawn so neither Connelley nor the other agents could see what was going on inside.

Connelley spoke to one of the agents. "See if the other men have the highways blocked. We don't want any innocent people hurt when the shooting starts."

The agent returned in five minutes. "All set out there. All the roads are blocked off."

Waking birds suddenly broke the ominous silence which prevailed. It was a silence which seemed to have arrived on the tail of a ritual quality of death. Connelley again shouted his order. The silence which followed was thick and heavy, a silence which now seemed to grow taut in the mist-hung morning.

Connelley shouted, "Ma Barker! Fred! This is your very last warning. Come out or we'll start shooting. We're going to use tear

gas, so you don't have a chance. Sixty seconds. Come out, Fred! Ma Barker!"

The silence continued for what seemed like an eternity, and the agents grew fidgety.

Suddenly the silence was shattered by a woman's voice, a voice that sounded like a gull's screech, with murderous overtones riding on every word.

"Come and get us, you dirty copper bastards!" And then a rataplan of gunfire from automatic weapons chewed up the earth where Connelley stood. He ducked quickly behind the safety of one of the trees in front of the house. Ma Barker was firing from a downstairs window, and Fred from an upstairs window.

There was no more stillness in the misty morning air. This was the last of a criminal gang, the swan song sung to the music of roaring guns, as it always is when defiant gunmen, robbers, and murderers refuse to surrender or to sell their lives cheaply.

Over the years, in this era of Prohibition, the wild decades of the Roaring Twenties and Terrible Thirties, the gangs came up from the slums, most of them with guns in their hands, and they brought a violence that was as vicious and brutal as the slash of a straight razor.

They came in violence and left in violence, and they came swiftly, like comets burning through the

sky, and left as swiftly—hoods and killers like Vincent "Mad Dog" Coll, Jack "Legs" Diamond, "Machine gun" Jack McGurn, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, John Dillinger, and the others.

They were petty thieves in their youth, and rose up the ladder of crime to become bank robbers, kidnapers and murderers.

But not the Barkers. They were born criminals, amoral and atavistic, brought into the world by a woman more fearsome than most men who walked the dark paths of crime, undoubtedly the most cold-blooded and murderous woman who ever came onto the American criminal scene. She left a legend of her violence which earned her the name of *The Devil's Daughter*. And if she wasn't his daughter, he was surely sitting on her shoulder during the many years of her depredations.

Ma Barker's violence was awesome and absolute and was strung through her life like so many nightmare pictures, each more ugly and hideous than the last.

She was born Arizona Clark of Scotch-Irish-Indian parents. When she was an infant the family moved to the Ozark Mountain region of Missouri, a wild territory which saw many of the early day Western gun slingers, men like Cole Younger, the James boys, Wesley Hardin and Quantrill's Raiders.

Her home life was filled with poverty and drunkenness, illiter-

acy and incest. She was seduced at thirteen by her father, later by an uncle, and later didn't give a damn who took her, because she accepted that as a way of her life and meant nothing to her.

It is doubtful that she ever understood morality in its true sense, and certainly in the years which followed she proved to be a woman without human conscience. She was always buxom, ruddy-faced, coarse, sloppy, and always in conflict with herself and society, unable by moral intelligence to overcome the handicap of her birth and her upbringing.

She was a hater of that portion of society that could look down on her and her kind. She was hotly conscious of the women who would sweep their skirts together as they passed her and, recognizing the gesture for what it was, she made a vow to get even.

While still in her teens, Arizona Clark married George Barker, a hired farmhand, illiterate and self-effacing, dominated from the first by his dumpy, slovenly spouse. In the years before she drove him from their home she bore him four sons, Arthur, Herman, Lloyd, and Fred.

Arthur, small, about five feet two, and weighing one hundred and thirty pounds, was nicknamed "Doc" after he had been sent to the Oklahoma State Pen for the murder of a night watchman during a robbery. He was assigned to

the hospital as an orderly, and the truth of the matter is that he couldn't administer a bedpan efficiently. He was the most dangerous of the brothers, a rattlesnake at heart and as unpredictable.

When the boys were in their early teens the family moved to Webb City. Husband George went to work in the lead mines, brought home his paltry pay, which Ma snatched from his hand, then cursed him because it was insufficient to feed, clothe, and allow her sons the things she wanted them to have.

"You're a no-good bum," she swore at her husband. "You can't make enough to hold our bodies together an' you're too damn weak and yellow to steal! I don't know why the hell I was stupid enough to marry you!"

George Barker took her tirades with a stoical attitude. He was, as a matter of fact, afraid of her, fearful of rousing her vicious temper. On more than one occasion she had beat him with a heavy iron frying pan because he had dared to spend fifty cents from his pay on a few glasses of beer. Her verbal assaults were as terrifying to him as her physical attacks and he shrank from both.

Then one day, at last, weary of her assaults, he rebelled, in a mild way, and she screamed at him, "Get out of my house, you no-good weak bastard! My boys and I don't need you. Get out, and don't come back!"

GEORGE BARKER left, and that was the last he saw of her and his four sons. Ma Barker picked up her brood, took the name of Kate, and moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Because the law demanded it, she enrolled the boys in school, an act that caused every teacher an endless series of grief and heartache.

None of the boys possessed the slightest aptitude for any form of academic study. Arthur particularly was the most stupid scholar of the four. He and his brothers failed dismally in their first semester.

Ma Barker stormed into the school, and into the principal's office, scaring the daylights out of him as she started screaming.

"You're bitchy teachers didn't advance my boys! What kind of a damned school is this anyway?" She shook a finger in the principal's face. "You advance my boys, hear, or I'll turn this morgue into a cemetery!"

"I'll look into it," the principal promised, awed and more than a little terrified of this strange woman. "I will certainly look into it right away."

"That's a lot of junk. I don't want no lookin' into, hear? I want my boys advanced, just like them punks they promoted!"

The boys were passed, then and the next semester, and then Ma summarily yanked them out of school and the teachers heaved combined sighs of relief. They were so grateful for Ma's act they advis-

edly didn't report the absences to the truant officer.

The boys, at this time, were stealing from peddlers' carts, stores, even from the clothes lines in back yards. Little Arthur was picked up first as he walked out of a store with a large ham under his coat. The storekeeper saw him, chased him to the street, snatched back the ham and yelled for the cops.

Ma raced to the station house as soon as she received word of Arthur's misfortune.

"Why are you holding my boy?" she screamed at the sergeant behind the desk."

"For investigation of theft, madam. Your boy swiped a ham."

"That's a lie. My Arthur is a good boy. He goes to church regularly!"

"What for?" the sergeant asked. "To rob the poor box?"

"You lousy, baboon-faced copper, who the hell do you think you're talking to? We're God-fearing people, my boys and me!"

"Madam, if you don't stop that cursing you'll be in the cell next to your boy."

Ma took another tack. "Where's the ham my boy is accused of stealing? I want to see that ham. He stole a ham. Where is it? You ain't got the ham then you ain't got no evidence, hear? Now turn my boy loose or I'll go to the district attorney."

The sergeant realized Ma had a



MA BARKER

point. Besides, the juvenile court frowned on holding teen-agers in a lockup.

"Madam, I am going to let you take your boy home. But I want to tell you something. We know he's a crook and we're gonna watch him. When we catch him we're gonna see to it that he gets a little vacation in the reformatory."

When Ma got Arthur home she slapped him soundly. "You little dumb weasel! Ain't you got no brains at all to get caught by a dumb cop?"

"It wasn't the cop. It was the storekeeper."

"That's worse yet. Look good

before you take anything, hear? You got to plan things. And when you take anything run like hell!"

"Yes, Ma."

She thought a moment. "I think that dumb cop behind the desk gave me an idea. You might just stroll over to the church some morning and see if there's any money in that poor box."

Arthur brightened. "Sure, Ma. I'll do it tomorrow."

Ma patted him on the head. "And see you be careful."

"I will, Ma."

Arthur did rob the poor box, more than once, and Ma felt she had avenged herself on the sergeant.

Shortly thereafter, Arthur, Lloyd, Herman, and Fred joined the rowdy and notorious Central Park hoodlums, a gang of young toughs who engaged in petty thefts, minor robberies, burglaries, snatching purses, ganging up on lone storekeepers and walking off with the contents of the cash-drawer. On occasion they would drag girls walking alone on the street at night into dark corners and rape them.

The gang always hid out in Ma's house until the heat was off, and as one or the other went to jail he told fellow convicts that if they wanted help or a place to hideout they could go to Ma Barker.

In 1915, Herbie Farmer, a Joplin, Missouri farmboy turned bandit who later was to become in-

volved in the sensational Kansas City Massacre with Pretty Boy Floyd, got out of jail and went to call on Ma Barker. With Farmer's coming the age group widened, and experienced and hardened men came around.

She urged them to teach her boys all they knew. At the same time she took up with one or another of the men who came to her house, and when they left or were picked up she took up with others. She passed out her favors, such as they were, without any scruples, any shred of conscience. To her, all men were alike. Take one. It's free.

Things finally got too hot for her in Tulsa. She moved to Enid, and from there to Lawton, and then to Shawnee, and the mob of thieves, robbers, and murderers followed, one at a time, two at a time. But she was clever enough now not to get involved in anything in the cities where she made her home, nor permit the men who came to her to get involved in anything that would bring local heat.

"We got to have a place to hide out in," she said. "If we put heat on ourselves where we live, then pretty soon we'll run out of places where we can lay low until things cool off."

As her dealings with the underworld increased, so too did her feelings against all law and order. There was another side to her feelings. Despite her unfavorable appearances she had a great deal of

vanity that had been inflamed by an obsessive urge and desire to be better than those women in the Ozark Mountain region who had turned aside when she walked down the street.

But this vanity had a soft underbelly. It was the self knowledge that the scorn of those women was deserved. She wasn't their equal in any sense. This was really the society she hated, and this, in her secret heart, was her quarry.

The driving, malicious antagonism strained inside of her like a living thing that was held captive and struggling violently to escape. Some day it would get out.

To prepare for that day she went into the hills and practiced with guns, every kind of gun that came into her hands through the men who journeyed to her house to hide out until the heat on them waned.

In 1921, disaster struck her. Her affection for her sons, as deep as her hate of cops and society, was real. When Lloyd was picked up by federal agents for a mail stickup in Baxter Springs, Kansas, she was overwhelmed with grief.

Lloyd was tried, convicted, and sentenced to twenty-five years. Ma poured money into lawyers' hands in an effort to spring her son, but the feds had put him away too neatly. There were no legal loopholes, and no one was willing to take a payoff. Her inability to spring Lloyd was a new frustration

and it added to the mound of her hates.

She turned her attentions to the friends her other three sons brought home, using them to wreak her vengeance. Among these friends was Volney Davis, a hardened gunman.

"Volney," she said, "you are taking Lloyd's place in my home." She patted her breast. "And inside here, in my heart. You are my fourth son. We need money. If we get enough money we will be able to spring Lloyd."

Volney Davis and Doc spearheaded the drive on banks and payrolls, but not before Ma Barker had looked over the ground and laid out the plan for the holdup. In one of the heists, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Doc shot and killed the night watchman, an unarmed, inoffensive man named James J. Sherill. Davis and Doc were identified; ultimately arrested, brought to trial, convicted and sentenced to life.

Ma went to pieces for a while, brooding and weeping. When she got hold of herself again, there was a change in her. It was volcanic. The hate of all law and order, all forms of authority, was like a raging furnace within her. She was going to get even, but not without all due caution for the protection of Herman and Freddie.

"Don't let them take you," she advised them. "Flatten anybody who gets in your way. Do you hear?"

"Sure, Ma," Freddie assured her. "We'll take care of it."

"Well, sons, we got a lot of work to do. We got to get Arthur and Lloyd outta jail. We can't let them rot there. We need lots of money. We got to get it, sons."

"We'll get it, Ma. Don't worry," Herman said.

Ma insisted on going over each job before Freddie and Herman pulled it. She would walk into a bank, looking like the dowdy wife of a poor dirt farmer and ask for change of a small bill, talk to the teller, and then to the manager, and inquire how she might be able to borrow a few hundred dollars to "kinda tide us over till we harvest the crops."

All the while she talked with both the teller and manager she took careful note of the layout of the bank, the number of customers who came in at that particular time, and if the windows had shades which could be pulled down. When she had fixed everything in her mind she departed.

Back home she drew an accurate diagram of the bank's interior, positions of the tellers' cages and the manager's office. She then laid out the getaway route, which she had timed almost to the second, rating it according to the speed at which the car could be driven safely on both the paved and dirt roads.

In a bank robbery in Kansas City, with Ma at the wheel of the car, a shooting affray broke out

and Freddie was wounded. When the bank guard followed Herman and Freddie out into the street Ma, screaming invectives, leaned out the open window of the car and fired a shotgun blast at the guard. Her aim was bad because of her violent anger over Freddie's wound, and the guard dashed back into the safety of the bank interior.

She drove from the scene like a woman gone mad, the car swerving wildly as it made its own road, careening over the dirt backroad at 90 miles an hour, and all the time she kept yelling back at Freddie and Herman.

"Son, are you all right? Herman, take care of Freddie!"

At one point, when she was yelling back at her two boys, the car almost went into a ditch and Herman shouted at her to keep her mind on her driving. "Freddie's okay, Ma. He's okay. Don't worry. Don't kill us, Ma. Watch where you're driving!"

They made it back to Joplin safely and Ma, frantic with worry, cleaned Freddie's arm with alcohol while he grimaced in pain, then bandaged it.

"It's all right, son," she said sympathetically. "Only a flesh wound. You should've killed that dirty cop."

"I didn't have a chance, Ma. He fired at me when we was leaving. My back was to him."

"You should've killed him when you was looking at him."

"I sure will the next time, Ma," Freddie rasped.

IN THE NEXT several months, while Freddie was recovering from his wound, Herman met Ray Terrill, a hoodlum and gunman who had specific ideas on how to rob banks. They stole a heavy-duty, open-end truck, constructed a winch near the tail of the platform, picked up a tarpaulin, and were ready.

They cased a bank with Ma's help, went over the getaway route, and in the dead of night backed the truck against the rear of the bank, jimmied the door, winched the portable safe onto the truck and were off.

They took bank after bank in this fashion, and Ma used most of the money to try to buy freedom for Doc and Lloyd. The lawyers bled her dry, taking her money, knowing when they took it that they could do nothing about freeing either Doc or Lloyd. Their cases had no basis for appeal, and neither had yet served enough time to warrant a bribe-taking official to chance their premature release.

It was a dangerous game for the lawyers to play, because they didn't know Ma Barker, that she was capable of taking the most terrible kind of vengeance.

One night, when Herman and Terrill were breaking into a bank, a sheriff's patrol car with three deputies in it caught them as they were



FRED BARKER

winching the safe onto the truck. The sheriffs took them in for questioning, and while they were on their way to the station both men leaped from the car and escaped. They met a week later at Ma's house.

"My boys, my boys!" Ma greeted them. "I read about it in the papers. I was afraid you would be nabbed. But you got luck on your side, boys. You don't have to be afraid of getting nabbed. No matter what happens, luck will be on your side."

Herman grinned. "That's right, Ma. We got luck on our side." He punched playfully at Terrill. "Ain't that right, Ray?"

Terrill grinned back. "Sure looks like it."

They were wrong.

In an attempted bank robbery several weeks later, Herman shot and killed a police officer named John Marshall, and in the wild shooting that ensued he was hit several times in the chest.

Ray Terrill dragged him to the car, shooting as he did so, and sped off. Herman died an hour later, and fearing that a dead man in the car would endanger his own safety in case he was stopped for any reason, he dumped Herman's body into a weed patch outside of Wichita, Kansas. He reported the details to Ma Barker.

"You dirty rat," Ma railed at him, "you should have brought my boy home, dead or alive!"

Terrill tried to explain again but Ma Barker was deaf to all reason. "Did you want me to get nabbed too? Would that have brought Herman back?"

"I don't give a damn about whether you would've got nabbed or not, hear! You shoulda brought my boy home!"

"Do you want me to leave?" Terrill asked.

"No!" She was wild with the lust for revenge and she had suddenly made up her mind to carry out her plan for vengeance. Her voice softened. "Maybe you was right. But my boy is dead and I'm very upset." She patted him on the shoulder. "It's all right. You can stay."

She fixed him something to eat, set a bottle of corn liquor on the table before him. "Drink up, Ray. You need it."

Terrill did, to the point of drunkenness, and then Ma led him to bed. When he was asleep, dead to the world, Ma tip-toed into the bedroom, leveled a shotgun at his head and blew his face away. Then she and Freddy loaded his body into a car, drove to a field several miles from the house and dumped out the body.

Ma's luck went from bad to worse. The cops got a line on Freddy for the Kansas City job, picked him up, built a case against him, and he was convicted and sentenced to the Kansas State Penitentiary. And Ma Barker was alone.

But not quite. Her house was still the hideout for criminals on the lam and she housed them, fed them, and staked them to guns and money. She also had a hand in the planning of their robberies.

In 1930, Freddy was released from prison and brought with him a 22-year-old thief and gunman named Alvin Karpis, who was destined to become Public Enemy Number One until he was finally nabbed.

Karpis, slim, blue-eyed, with brown hair and a cruel mouth, was born in Montreal, Canada, in 1909, the son of Anna and John Kapravicz, hard-working, God-fearing Lithuanian immigrants.

When the family moved to Chi-

cago in 1923 he remained there for a while and then went to Topeka, Kansas, to live with a married sister.

Thoroughly heartless, an unconscionable killer, Karpis started stealing in his early teens. When he was only sixteen years old he drew a ten-year sentence in the State Industrial Reformatory at Hutchinson. About three years after he was committed he broke out of prison and beat his way back to Chicago.

After a series of thefts, he was captured again and returned to the reformatory. On his second trip there he met Freddie Barker. They made a pact to get together upon their release, and did so in 1930, when he joined Freddie and Ma Barker in Joplin, Missouri, where Ma had been persuaded by Herbie Farmer to set up housekeeping. Ma Barker was enchanted with Karpis. Here was a young man with guts and the same kind of hatred of cops she had.

"You're a fine boy, Alvin," Ma said. "Like one of my own sons."

Karpis was pleased. "I'll try to be, Ma."

If ever an alliance could be said to have been influenced by the devil, this meeting between Ma Barker and Alvin Karpis was it.

Meanwhile, Doc was biding his time. In the Oklahoma Pen he met William Weaver, alias "Weaving Willie", a gunman and robber, and recommended him to Ma.

Before Weaver reached the

Barker hangout, Ma met Arthur V. Dunlop, alias George Anderson, and took him on as her lover. She felt she needed someone with all but Freddy in jail, although she now did have a foster son in Karpis. Her longing for Doc and Lloyd was deep, and the absence of hope for their release in the near future, and their design of love and affection were holes in her being. She accepted Dunlop as a substitute.

Weaver didn't like Dunlop on sight.

"Mister, you stink," he told Dunlop the first night he met him. "A bird knows a rattlesnake, so why don't you shove off?"

"I belong here, you don't," Dunlop answered, "so why don't you shove off?"

"We'll see," Weaver replied.

Weaving Willie wrote Doc a letter and signed Ma's name to it, telling Doc all about Dunlop, whom he suspected of being a rat.

Doc "flew a kite," prison slang for an underground letter, to Weaver. The smuggled note held these terse, cryptic words: "Dump him."

Weaving Willie and George "Shotgun" Zeigler, a Chicago hood hiding out at Ma's, took Dunlop for a walk along the shore of a lonely lake, shot him six times in the head and threw his body into the lake.

Ma learned of it, of course, and was extremely displeased. However, she said nothing of it to either Willie or Zeigler, and she certainly did not blame Doc. She would

never blame any of her boys for anything they did. She did blame the man who sent Doc the information, and Zeigler for killing Dunlop. Ma bided her time.

Several weeks later she thought up an errand. She sent Zeigler to Cicero, Illinois, stronghold of the Capone mob. After Zeigler left she telephoned Jack McGurn, one of the men who wielded a machine gun in the notorious St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago.

"Jack," Ma said, "I'm sending you a pigeon. Zeigler. He talks too much. Will you do it for me? Thanks. I'll return the favor some day."

Zeigler's execution was carried out with the usual McGurn efficiency and dispatch. When Zeigler stepped out of the doorway of the building where he had gone to deliver a meaningless message he was cut into ribbons from two simultaneous shotgun blasts.

Ma had achieved her niche. She had power. She could send word to a large city like Chicago, St. Louis, or Kansas City and have a man killed. The thought of it was like heavy wine. She thought of the bitches who had turned aside when she walked a street, who swished their skirts around, fearful they would be contaminated by Ma's touch. She knew what they were. Sweet outside and dirty and weak inside, cheats, adulteresses, secret whores.

Who were they kidding? Could

they get a man killed? Could they command such power as that? No. Ma was smug with the sense of her power.

The early days of her life when she was merely a female satisfying a man's lust faded. She was a queen, and she had an empire, an efficient criminal empire now that Alvin Karpis, and that fine boy Harvey Bailey had come into the fold.

Harvey Bailey was soft-spoken, polite, courteous to the point of gallantry, handsome in a rugged, manly way, with wavy hair, wide-set dark brown eyes, and clean-cut features. He could have easily been mistaken for a doctor, lawyer, or other professional man. Six feet tall, carrying his one hundred and seventy-five pounds like a trained athlete in perfect condition, he appealed to Ma as no man she had ever known or seen. An experienced bank robber, with some twenty heists behind him, he listened while Ma outlined a job, then said he would like to look it over himself.

"If you don't mind, Ma," Bailey said. "I like to see the bank first, and to go over the getaway. I get a fuller picture that way." He turned to Karpis and Freddie. "You boys don't mind?"

"Hell no," Karpis said. "I know your rep, Harvey. I'll go along with anything you say."

Bailey always had cased his robberies, and laid his plans like a gen-

eral planning a military stratagem. He would select the men who were to go with him according to each man's particular specialty. No motion picture producer ever selected a cast with greater care than Bailey did for the robbery of a bank, nor did any director ever rehearse his actors any better than did Bailey for the roles they were to play in the robbery.

Bank job after bank job followed, smoothly, efficiently, and often with terrifying results for innocent customers who were unfortunate enough to be in the banks at the times of the holdups. A wild gun fight here, a killing there. A vice-president and a guard in the First National Bank in Fairbury, Nebraska, a sheriff in West Plains, Missouri.

There was compressed terror and horror for the men and women when they saw a man who was alive a moment before dropping dead in a pool of his own blood as machine gun slugs tore into his body.

THE TROUPE MOVED fast, from city to city, and state to state, and Ma Barker moved with them. The FBI knew this was a new gang, and a highly efficient one. It was also a deadly mob, quick to kill if anyone dared resist. However, they couldn't get a line on the men because they ran into banks wearing dark glasses, hats pulled low over their foreheads, and worked with such

speed that accurate descriptions were all but impossible.

Furthermore, they so terrified everyone in a bank that senses were shocked into complete paralysis. A woman employee told the FBI she thought she might be able to identify one of the robbers.

"He's slim, hard—oh, my God, but he's hard. He gave me the creeps. He looks creepy. He's the one who carried the machine gun and fired the shots into the ceiling when they came in."

Creep. Look for the creepy man. The name stuck to Alvin Karpis.

Success rode with the gang for a solid year, and then Doc Barker got out of jail! Things immediately got worse for the banks. Ma threw a big party in the huge house in Chicago where the gang now made its headquarters to celebrate Doc's release. It was a riotous affair. Each of the men had a girl.

Karpis had picked up a seventeen-year-old blond in St. Paul named Doris Delaney. She was pretty, with the morals of an alley-cat, and had been the girl friend of a string of petty crooks. Karpis was the first big-time robber she had ever known and she clung to him as if he were immortal.

She had two sisters, equally blond and as pretty, and with the same kind of morals. They joined the mob as the girl friends of Doc and Freddy.

Carole Erickson, a Junoesque blond beauty in her twenties, was

Harvey Bailey's girl friend and seemed strangely out of place among the other girls and their hoods and gunmen. She was sedate, reserved, obviously well-bred, and contented herself with sitting in a large armchair alongside Bailey and nursing a single drink. The other girls danced, sang, told ribald jokes, and did caricatures of strippers, even to taking off their clothes, right down to flimsy bras and French panties which left nothing to the imagination.

Carole smiled at Bailey and said, "I have such a lovely apartment on Lake Shore Drive. It overlooks the lake and the line of trees in the parkway." She smiled more broadly. "And the bed has silk sheets."

"It's too inviting to be ignored," Bailey answered, and offered her his arm. "It is too noisy here anyway."

As they neared the door, Ma said, "Harvey, we'll have something to talk about tomorrow. Some business matters."

"I'll be here. About four in the afternoon."

The business matter concerned the bank in Fort Scott, Kansas. It had been thoroughly cased by Ma Barker and Bailey, and on a bright day in 1932, Bailey, Karpis, Volney Davis, Doc Barker, and a new member, Earl Christman, strode into the bank while Freddy remained at the wheel of the powerful getaway car with the motor running.

As they entered the bank, Karpis raised his machine gun at the ceiling and fired a burst.

"This is a stickup!" he yelled. "Freeze! Everybody freeze. Lie on the floor, and don't look up. I'll kill the first one who does!"

Bailey and Christman moved swiftly to the railed-off partition where the manager and his assistant sat behind desks. Bailey yanked the manager out of his chair while Christman slugged the assistant manager across the head with his pistol.

"Move!" Bailey ordered. "Into the cages." He handed the now thoroughly cowed manager a pillow case. "Fill this up. Tight. Move! Move!"

Doc Barker remained at the door, his machine gun at ready. It was all over in about two minutes, but not before Doc ordered the bank guard to stand up, and when that hapless man did so Doc smashed him across the face with an automatic pistol. The guard's nose broke with a crunching sound, and his left eye grew red with the blood that shot out of the socket. The guard fell to the floor, screaming with pain. Doc spat down at him, turned, and stalked out of the bank.

The getaway was swift and clean. In a rented house several miles from the scene of the robbery Ma Barker awaited them.

"My boys, my boys!" she greeted them as they came in, one at a time,



about ten seconds apart after ditching the stolen car so as not to arouse suspicion.

The loot was divided quickly and evenly by Ma, who chattered like an excited monkey all the time she was counting the money and handing it out.

"We'll meet in Chicago, boys," Ma said. "At my house. Make it in about a week. Meanwhile, have a good time." She turned to Bailey, whom she admired as the brains of the mob, the thinker and planner. "What're you gonna do, son?"

"I think I'll go to Kansas City. I have some friends there. And maybe Carole will come in from Chicago."

"Good, good. I'll see you about a week from now, eh, son?"

"Sure, Ma. I'll be there."

He was wrong.

About a week after he arrived in Kansas City he decided to play a little golf with two friends named Keating and Holden, a couple of hoods who had escaped from the Leavenworth Penitentiary. While they were playing, FBI agents appeared and arrested Keating and Holden. They didn't know Bailey, because there was no FBI sheet on him, but since he was with Keating and Holden they decided to take him in too.

While he was held and questioned, an agent thought he looked a great deal like the descriptions given of one of the bandits who had taken part in several bank robberies. A cashier of the Fort Scott Bank then made a positive identification, and things got very dark for Harvey Bailey.

Carole Erickson called Ma Barker as soon as she learned of Bailey's arrest and the subsequent identification by the Fort Scott cashier.

"Don't go near him!" Ma warned Carole. "Don't visit him in the jail, and don't write him. If you do, you might lead the cops to us!"

"But how will he know I didn't desert him?" Carole argued. "I wouldn't want him to think that."

"I'll get the message to him. You come right back to Chicago or you're liable to get in trouble. The

cops are probably checking every hotel in Kansas City right now to find out if he had someone with him, a girl maybe. If they find you they'll hold you until you talk, say something that will hurt us."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that. I don't know anything, really."

"Look, girlie, I said for you to come back to Chicago right now. Either you're on the next train or I'll send somebody to get you. You got it?"

Ma's tone frightened Carole and she agreed to leave at once.

"Give me your Chicago address," Ma said. "I'll let you know how things go."

Ma got the gang together then and told them they had to take another bank. "We need a lot of money to spring Harvey. He's one of us, one of my boys, like all of you. We can't let him rot in jail."

The gang agreed and plans were laid to rob the Cloud County Bank at Concordia, Kansas. The holdup of the bank was pulled off in sensational manner, the loot taken amounting to \$250,000. Ma Barker immediately sought out the best criminal lawyer she could find. He was Earl Smith.

"Do you think you can get Harvey Bailey off?" Ma asked.

Smith, hungry for the large fee he saw coming, said, "Yes, I do, but it will cost a lot of money. I'll have to do a lot of fixing along the way. On its merits, Bailey hasn't a chance."

"I understand," Ma said. "How much?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

Ma opened her purse and counted out thirty thousand dollars. "I'll bring the rest tomorrow." She rose from the chair, looked at Smith in her queerly direct, penetrating way, her eyes cold as the muzzle of a gun. "I hope you won't make any mistakes, Mr. Smith. I wouldn't like that."

Smith shuddered a little under her icy stare but quickly gathered himself together. "Trust me. Everything will be all right."

It was a foolish mistake. Smith took a case he didn't have a chance to win, and so signed his death warrant. Bailey, of course, was convicted and sentenced to fifty years in the Kansas State Pen.

Ma Barker was livid with rage over Smith's failure.

"Go get him!" she ordered the gang. "He double-crossed us. He's a rat!"

The gang lured Smith from his office, threw him into a car, drove to a secluded side road and shot him dead.

Bailey, getting his first taste of prison life, found close confinement extremely unpalatable. He sent word in coded language to Ma through an attorney she had sent to interview him for a possible appeal and to learn what it was he wanted her to do for him. She got his answer. "Send me a gun."

Ma went immediately to see Car-

ole Erickson and outlined her plan. Carole was shocked.

"Oh, my God, Mrs. Barker, I just couldn't do a thing like that. I'd be frightened to death." She paced the floor of her living room with nervous strides.

"You want to help Harvey, don't you?"

"Yes, I would like to help him. But—"

"Listen, girlie, all you do is deliver this package to a man in Lansing, Kansas. You call him when you get there and he will come to meet you. You don't have to say anything to him. Just give him the package."

"But the gun—there will be a gun in that package, won't there?"

Ma realized she shouldn't have told her of that and lied out of it. "No, there won't. Just money. You don't even have to know that." She saw the girl's reluctance, so put it on a different basis. "The boys and Harvey are depending on you. They wouldn't want to know you refused to help."

Carole saw the light. She had become involved and now there was no way out. It was do it or else.

ON MEMORIAL DAY in 1933, during the progress of a baseball game on the prison diamond, Bailey carried out the most sensational prison break in America. He walked up to Warden Prather, shoved the pistol into his ribs and said, "Warden, I don't want to kill you but if you

don't do exactly as I say I'm going to empty this gun into your belly."

Warden Prather knew that Bailey meant every word he said and since he wasn't ready to die he agreed to follow orders.

"We're going to have a little parade, Warden, and you're going to lead it, right through that gate. Let's go."

With Prather at the head and Bailey behind him, in full view of the guards and the hundreds of inmates who set up a series of encouraging yowls, eleven hardened criminals marched to freedom through the back gate. Outside the walls, they got into two highpowered cars, used the warden as a shield and hostage, and roared away. Bailey released Warden Prather at midnight near Shawnee, Oklahoma.

The escapees split up, each going in different directions. Bailey headed north for St. Paul, found railway and bus stations heavily manned by cops on the lookout for him and changed course. He headed south, made it to Texas, where he tried to get in touch with Ma Barker. He had a pocketful of money but at the moment it wasn't doing him a bit of good. Cops spotted him, drew their guns, and took him into custody.

Aware that Bailey was the cleverest and most dangerous of all the men they had ever had in custody, the cops took no chances with him. They drove him to Dallas and

locked him up in the condemned cell of the Dallas County Jail.

The underworld grapevine got immediate word to Ma Barker. "Bailey wants a gun!"

She had friends in Dallas and made a hurried call to a man she knew she could trust. "Ten thousand dollars. A gun to Bailey."

"He's in a condemned cell. You better make it twenty grand."

"You got it. Move fast before they yank him outta there and rush him back to prison."

"When will I get the money?"

"Tomorrow morning. A blond girl will bring it to you. She's Bailey's girl, so don't try anything funny."

"All I want is the money."

Several days later, when the guard brought Bailey's breakfast, Harvey moved quickly out of his cell and pointed the gun at the jailer's guts.

"Mister, you and I are going out of here together. Standing up or feet first, but we're going to do it together. How do you want it?"

"Standing up!"

"Let's go."

In the street, Bailey said, "Where's your car?"

"Over there. The black Ford."

With the gun in his side, the captured guard drove at high speeds directly north. At Ardmore, Oklahoma, they ran into a roadblock with about a dozen cars filled with FBI agents, sheriffs, and city cops. Bailey didn't have a chance.

On the way to Oklahoma City, one of the FBI agents asked him about the gun. "Where did you get it, Bailey?"

Harvey Bailey snickered. "Mickey Mouse brought it to me."

"You'd be a lot better off if you copped out. I'll ask you again. Where did you get the gun?"

"I bought it from J. Edgar Hoover."

The agent knew it was hopeless. Bailey wasn't a rat and would protect an accomplice until hell froze over. The F.B.I. man dropped the matter.

Bailey was removed to Leavenworth, where he was placed in solitary confinement, later retried, sentenced to life, and in 1934 he was transferred to Alcatraz.

Ma gave up when Bailey was sent to Alcatraz. Alvin Karpis and Doc Barker now took over dual leadership of the gang. Bank holdup followed bank holdup, the murderous Karpis blasted two cops in the heist of the Third Northwestern Bank of Minneapolis. Doc Barker shot down a by-stander who foolishly started to take down the license number of the getaway car.

Bank employees and customers identified photos of Doc Barker and Karpis, and of Volney Davis, that happy-go-lucky hoodlum and bandit. Newspapers screamed of the robbery and murders in banner headlines. A new title had been added to the annals of crime—The Barker-Karpis Gang.

A score of FBI agents were ordered into the search for the gang. There was no trace of them in either Minneapolis or St. Paul, and for a good reason. The gang had moved west, to Reno, where they were furnished a hideout by underworld friends.

The three murders didn't upset Ma Barker, nor did the fact that Doc was among those sought for the crimes. Her life had long ago fallen into a pattern which she accepted, risk and evasion of capture. The only emotions she recognized were those which applied to her. She was a paranoid and suffered the paranoid's urge to get even, to break, crush, destroy.

The love for her sons was buried deep in the well of her sickness and it would never come up again. Now they were a means toward an end, the fight to stay free and alive, continue the depredations against the society she hated, and to kill, kill, kill!

There was too much heat on the gang at the moment for other bank jobs so Ma decided on kidnaping. "Somebody with a lot of money."

Their first victim was the head of the Hamm Brewery Company in St. Paul, William Hamm, Jr. Ma, Doc, and Karpis worked out the details. The kidnaping went off smoothly and the gang collected \$100,000 before releasing their victim.

The gang lived high and soon everyone was broke. It was time for another bank. This time it was



Stockyard National Bank in South St. Paul. The stake was small. Only \$30,000. During the course of the robbery Karpis killed a cop and Doc wounded another.

This wasn't the same gang any more. They needed Harvey Bailey's shrewd planning. Minor arguments between the men were common, and violent ones between the women. Finally, it was decided to split up.

However, each on his own couldn't make it and some time later the gang got together again at Ma's behest.

"Another kidnaping," Ma said. "A president of a bank, a guy named George Bremer."

On the morning of a cold day several weeks later, the gang snatched George Bremer as he stopped for a traffic light. There followed then weeks of phone calls. Finally, after more than a month, the family paid over the amount asked, \$200,000.

Bremer was released just outside of Rochester, Minnesota, and then the FBI went to work. The descrip-

tion of the kidnapers given to the FBI by Bremer tallied with those given of the marauding bank robbers. During the questioning of Bremer the FBI turned up a peculiar and very interesting detail.

Bremer said, "The kidnapers carried their own gasoline. On several occasions I heard them fill the tank and throw away the used cans."

A trivial incident, but it was enough for the FBI to go on. They sent teletypes to local and state police of five states. In two days they had recovered four discarded gasoline cans. The cans yielded clear fingerprints.

In the FBI offices in Washington, J. Edgar Hoover held in his hand the photo of a man whose prints were taken from the cans. It was a picture of a man with a toothbrush mustache and a thin line for a mouth. The eyes were cold as slate.

Holding the picture in his hand, Hoover said, "Among all the wickedness I have encountered in twenty-two years as director of the FBI, the misdeeds of this one mad lawbreaker give me the greatest concern. Not because he is a genius of criminals, but because he has clearly demonstrated what mischief sheer mediocrity can do in an indifferent society."

The search for the gang was intensified. Doc was captured, tried, convicted, and sentenced to life at Alcatraz. In trying to escape from

his dread island prison he was shot and killed. Volney Davis and Karpis were captured. They, too, received life terms at Alcatraz. Others of the gang were also rounded up.

All that remained now of the mob was Lloyd, who was still in prison, and Ma Barker and Freddy, who were on the lam, running from state to state, sometimes together, sometimes separately, meeting at an arranged rendezvous and going on in the darkness of the night when they would least be likely to be spotted.

The two found themselves at last in Florida, disguised as best as they could. Under the name of T. Blackburn, Fred rented a large two-story house from the millionaire president of the Miami Kennel Club. The house was situated on the shores of Lake Weir at Oklawaha.

The intensive search for Ma Barker and Fred ended at last when the FBI got a line on their Lake Weir hideout. Agents were all around the house, machine guns in their hands. It was going to be kill or be killed, this much the agents knew. But they were hopeful. Maybe Ma Barker would see the light.

Special Agent Donnelley yelled again. "Ma Barker, come out!"

Ma was in an upstairs room with Fred, her eyes dark with hate and malice. She picked up a machine gun from a table, inserted the drum, cocked it.

"Son," she said, "we haven't got one chance in a million to get out of this. There must be fifty cops out there. If we give up we'll die in a stinking prison cell. Do you want to do that?"

"No, Ma." Fred was frightened. "But what do we do now?"

"We'll try to take as many of those bastard cops with us as we can. You take that Thompson gun and go downstairs. Cover the back and right side of the house. I'll cover the front and left side. That sub has fifty rounds in the drum. Take one of them shotguns too, and one of them forty-five caliber pistols."

Fred picked up the guns and hurried downstairs. As he reached the ground floor, a shout came from outside the house.

Special Agent Donnelley commanded, "This is your last warning, Ma Barker. You, too, Fred. Come out. With your hands up!"

"Come and get us, you bastards!" Ma answered, and fired a short burst from her machine gun. The agents ducked quickly behind trees and the parked cars.

Donnelley gave a signal with his hand and the agents began firing into the house. The simultaneous firing of machine guns and pistols howled through the stillness of the morning, swept thunderously across the lake and echoed back so that it seemed as though a war was going on with armed men across both sides of the water. The shooting



continued without letup for about five or six minutes and then there was a lull.

Donnelley again shouted his command to Ma Barker to surrender. She shouted back an oath and let go another burst from her machine gun. Donnelley again gave his signal to the agents to resume their firing. By now all the windows in the house were pierced by slugs.

An agent said to Donnelley, "She's not going to sell herself cheaply, is she?"

"She's a bitch on wheels," Donnelley answered. "The devil must have been her father and a tigress her mother."

THERE WERE BRIEF lulls in the shooting in the next hour and one or another of the agents, thinking that Ma Barker and Fred must have been hit or were dead, stepped out a little from behind a tree. He was met immediately by a burst of gunfire and retreated quickly to the safety behind the tree.

Fred was the first to be hit.

A machine gun slug tore into his shoulder. He let out a hoarse cry as the blood spurted from the wound. "Ma!" he cried. "I'm hit! I'm hit!"

Ma heard him but there was no time for sympathy now, no time for the old affection. He would have to do as best he could, and the best thing he could do was to keep shooting.

She yelled back, "Keep shooting, Fred! Take somebody with you. Take one of them dirty cops!"

"I'm bleeding bad, Ma!" There was a frantic note in his voice, a fear, and a hopelessness. No sound of firing came from his position for several minutes and Ma yelled down again.

"Fred, keep shooting. You ain't dead yet. Keep shooting!"

As if to point the way for him, she let go several bursts from her machine gun. The agents returned the fire. Glass shattered and slugs whined eerily as they ricocheted off the walls, struck objects which crashed to the floor in fragments. The firing from outside the house was blistering.

Ma Barker shouted something incoherently down to Fred, her words twisted into meaningless sounds over the gunfire. The agents were now firing at the walls, trying to gauge the positions where Ma and Fred stood, hoping that some of the heavy slugs would pierce the plaster and find their marks.

Fred had resumed firing from downstairs and Ma believed that he

was all right, that the flow of blood from his wound had ceased. The truth of the matter was that he had been hit three times more. He came up the stairs, half-stumbling, the machine gun held limply in his hands, his shirt stained red with blood, his face twisted into a mask of pain.

"Ma," he pleaded, "I'm hit bad. Three or four times. I can hardly stand. I can't see very well either."

Ma looked at her son but didn't really see him in just that way, not in the way she wanted to, because this was a weeping, fearful, wounded and bleeding boy who had crawled to a mother who wasn't there, for help she couldn't give.

She shouted at him. "Get back downstairs, you yellow pig. Them cops will come storming in through that back door. Get down there! Get down!"

A fresh hail of slugs tore through the windows and thundered off the walls. Fred dropped to the floor and the machine gun clattered and bounced several feet from where he lay. Ma glanced at him quickly. For a brief moment some of the affection she had known for all her sons returned and passed over her face.

"I'll kill them! Keep my hands strong, God," she murmured in a sudden bizarre prayer. The drum in her machine gun suddenly was expended of slugs as she fired a short burst.

She dropped the machine gun

and picked up a Lewis .300 gas-operated automatic rifle, equipped with a 94-round drum and air-cooled by radiator fins. She shoved the nose of the gun through the window and fired burst after burst, sweeping the nose of the weapon back and forth across the area where the agents stood protected by the trees.

Fred revived. He lifted himself up laboriously, picked up the machine gun which had tumbled from his hands, and made his way back downstairs. He hadn't gone three steps when he was spun by several slugs which drilled into his back.

The machine gun fell from his hands and he leaned against a wall, blood pouring from him. He half turned and several more slugs hit him, and then he looked toward the stairs where he wanted to go, back to the room where his ma stood at a window fighting off an army.

He raised a hand toward the stairs, and then the hand fell limply to his side. He tried vainly to make the stairs, tried to cry out but the blood that filled his mouth choked off any words and he fell to the floor and was dead.

Donnelley noticed that the firing from the downstairs part of the house had ceased.

He said to the agents near him,

"I think we got Freddy boy. Let's concentrate on upstairs."

The agents poured volley after volley into the windows of the second floor. Ma came to the same conclusion that Donnelley had reached. Fred was dead. She called down to him.

"Fred! Fred! Keep shooting. Fred! Answer me! Fred, can you hear me?" Foolishly, wanting, in a last rush of maternal feeling, to give aid to her son, she stepped across the floor and in full view through the window. Three slugs hit her one through the heart.

"Got her!" Donnelley shouted. "Let's go. It's all over."

It was.

The agents dashed into the house. They found Fred on the floor, his face turned to the ceiling, his eyes open but unseeing. He had been struck by a dozen slugs. In the upstairs rooms they found Ma Barker dead. The one slug through the heart had been enough. The other two bullets, which had come almost simultaneously, could have killed her too.

Ma Barker died as she had lived, in violence, bloody and terrible, with only one of her sons with her, and at the end he couldn't help her. The devil could, and he took her. Why not? She was his daughter.

THE BOMB EXPERT

*"That ticking thing," they told him," is
a bomb. The clock says ten minutes to
ten. For you it's—ten minutes to death!"*



by **BILL PRONZINI**

THEY SAT in a small semi-circle, studying him.

Marcus Taylor said, "Well?"

The bomb expert sniffed his brandy. "This is quite good," he said. "Do you have it imported?"

Marcus Taylor was not a patient man. Idle conversation when there was business at hand was something he refused to tolerate. He drew himself erect in his chair, and his steel-gray eyes bored into the youngish man with the horn-

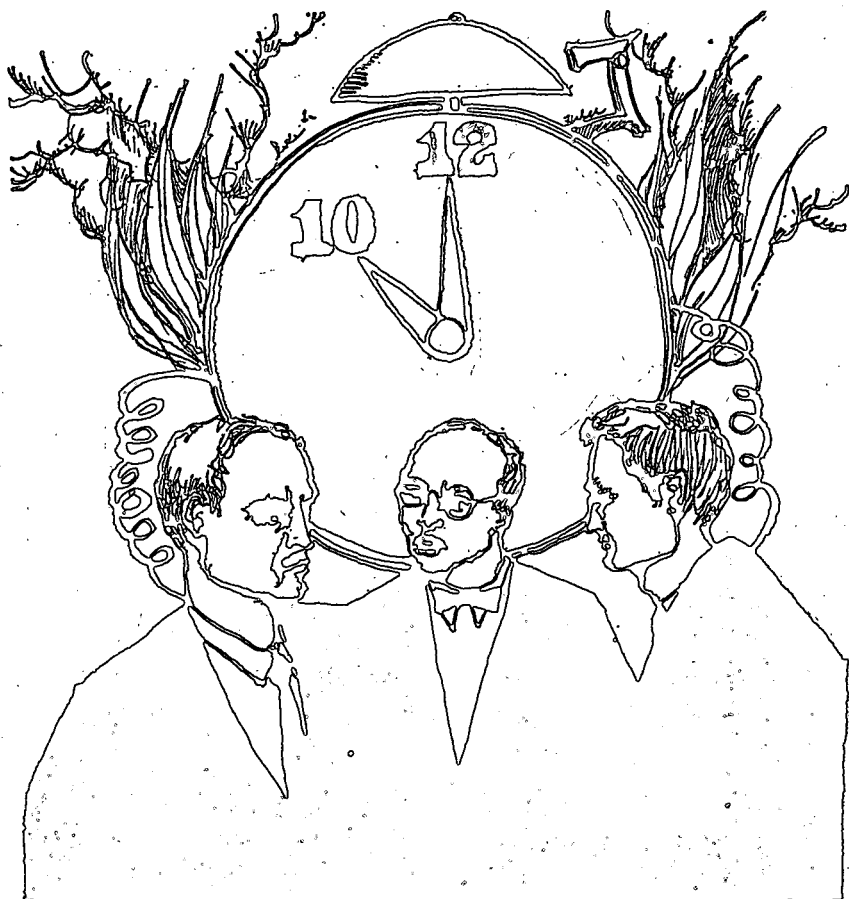
rims glasses who sat across from him.

"I ask you again, Mr. Smith," he said. "What is your price?"

The bomb expert smiled. "Ten thousand dollars."

There was momentary silence. Then: "Utterly ridiculous," Oliver Jaynes, who was seated to the left of Marcus Taylor, said in his high-pitched voice. "That's certainly far too much."

"We are prepared to offer you



five thousand," the fourth man in the room, Clayton Searles, said.

"Ten thousand dollars," the bomb expert said again. He tasted his brandy.

Marcus Taylor sat immobile.

"Sixty-five hundred—our absolute maximum offer."

"I do not barter," the bomb expert said.

"Neither do I," Marcus Taylor said.

"Then I am afraid we cannot reach a satisfactory agreement." The bomb expert placed his empty snifter carefully on the table by his chair and rose to his feet.

"Excellent brandy," he said. "Really quite good." He turned toward the door.

Marcus Taylor reached his decision quickly. He was a strong advocate of prompt action. Too much time spent pondering a subject, he felt, often led to regrettably tardy decisions, and ones which, more often than not, were exactly the choices that would have been made in the beginning. "One moment, please," Taylor said.

The bomb expert paused. "Yes?"

"I think perhaps some arrangements can be made after all," Marcus Taylor told him. "I would like to discuss the matter further with my associates."

"I will not waver from my price," the bomb expert said.

"So you informed us."

"Very well, then. Shall I wait outside?"

"If you don't mind."

"Of course not." The bomb expert left the room.

When the door had clicked shut behind him, Marcus Taylor stood and went to the long bar at the rear of his study. He poured himself a fresh brandy.

Oliver Jaynes followed him to the bar. Jaynes' pink, smooth face looked perplexed, and he finger-

combed his white hair nervously. "You're not actually thinking of paying him ten thousand dollars, are you, Marc?"

"Frankly, yes."

"But it's too much money?"

"Do we have an alternative?"

"We could find someone else."

"We cannot hire just anyone, you know. Our choice must be made carefully."

"I am sure there are others with the necessary qualifications."

"Undoubtedly," Marcus Taylor said. "But you realize, of course, that it took three weeks of most discreet inquiries to uncover Smith. Suppose we were to go on making inquiries for another three weeks, or a month, or more? How long do you imagine those inquiries would remain discreet? Do you have any idea of the position we would be in if the police discovered we were seeking out hired assassins only a short time preceding the death of our colleague?"

Jaynes thought about that. Slowly, he nodded, rubbing his pink jaw with short, timorous strokes. "I imagine you're right, Marc. But still and all, I don't like this Mr. Smith. He's too damned sure of himself."

"In his business," Clayton Searles, who had come up to refill his empty glass, said quietly, "I should think that would be an attribute."

"Well," Marcus Taylor said, "I cannot say as I care for his brash-

ness either. I have never fully trusted anyone who exhibited that trait. However, as I said before, I am afraid we have made our choice and must necessarily stand by it."

"We do have one consolation," Clayton Searles said. "Judging from what we have discovered, our Mr. Smith is more than adequate in his profession."

"Yes," Jaynes said. "Except that no one seems to know much about the man, other than he uses explosives solely and dispatches his work with competence. I would like to find out more about him before we—"

"Do you suggest we take the time to have a character study made?" Marcus Taylor said.

Jaynes grew silent under Taylor's withering stare. Clayton Searles said, "Marc's right. We're not dealing with stocks and bonds now; we're dealing with murder. This Mr. Smith is intelligent, well-polished, and, even with his seeming egotism, rather pleasant to talk with. Personally, I would be more inclined to trust a man such as he than a bearded dockhand with a third-grade vocabulary."

Jaynes chewed his lip nervously. "Yes, yes, you're right, of course. It's just that I don't want anything to go wrong."

"Nothing will go wrong, Ollie," Searles said. "You worry too damned much."

Marcus Taylor looked at the



other two men, his friends and business associates for almost half a century.

"Are we agreed, then?" he asked. "We will pay the ten thousand dollars."

"Agreed," Searles said.

Oliver Jaynes merely nodded.

"Tell him to come back in, will you, Clay?"

Searles crossed to the study door and admitted the bomb expert.

"Have you reached your decision, gentlemen?" the bomb expert asked.

"We have," Marcus Taylor said. "We will meet your price."

"Excellent," the bomb expert said, smiling. He gave a slight bow.

"I suppose you will want half the money now and half when you have finished?" Taylor asked.

"Not at all," the bomb expert

said. "I have complete trust in you, Mr. Taylor. You may pay me the entire ten thousand when the assignment is completed."

Marcus Taylor was somewhat surprised. But he nodded and said, "Won't you have a seat, Mr. Smith?"

"Thank you," the bomb expert said. He returned to the chair he had occupied earlier. "I wonder if I might impose upon you for another glass of your fine brandy?"

When Clayton Searles had brought him the brandy, the bomb expert leaned back comfortably in his chair. They waited for him to speak, but he sat relaxed, holding the snifter beneath his nose. He sniffed appreciatively, not drinking.

After a time, he said, almost idly, "The name of the man you wish disposed of, please?"

"Lawrence Jarrod," Marcus Taylor said flatly.

The bomb expert smiled. "I rather expected it would be."

"Did you, now?"

"Certainly," the bomb expert said. "The three of you gentlemen, along with Mr. Jarrod, are equal partners in an investment firm known as Marginal, Incorporated. Even though you, Mr. Taylor, are chairman of the board of this firm, all of your business transactions in the past, without fail, have been conducted with the four of you present. Since there are only three of you here tonight, it was only

natural for me to make an educated assumption." He paused. "Of course, there are other factors as well."

"Such as?"

"Jarrod is a much younger man than you. Late forties, I believe. He is also inclined to be somewhat irresponsible with money, and has gotten involved in several rather delicate situations with married women in the past. Scandals of this nature, such as the one you just recently managed to squelch before it reached the newspapers—Jarrod was named co-respondent in an adultery suit, if I recall correctly—are extremely harmful to business, are they not?"

The three men looked at one another.

"Do you always take it upon yourself to investigate your prospective clients?" Marcus Taylor asked.

"I am a business man, like yourselves," the bomb expert said. "I am sure you investigate your potential clients before extending them credit or service, do you not?"

A very shrewd young man, Marcus Taylor thought. Very shrewd, indeed. He said, "You have uncovered part of the reason for our wanting Jarrod eliminated. There is, however, another factor. We have managed to endure, over the years, Jarrod's indiscretions and failures as a man, simply because he is an excellent investment coun-

selor and an uncanny judge of market potential. But, almost a month ago, we made a discovery which, coupled with what we have had to put up with in the past, led us without hesitation to our present decision."

"Marc," Oliver Jaynes began. "I don't think—"

"Oh, be quiet, Ollie," Taylor said. "He's probably guessed it anyway."

The bomb expert smiled slowly. "Embezzlement?"

"Precisely," Marcus Taylor said.

"How much, if I may ask?"

"Lord knows, down through the years," Taylor said. "We've been able to find eighty-three thousand dollars missing thus far. And we've only gone back six years."

"You have proof, then?"

"Naturally. We've audited the books ourselves."

"Why not go to the police?" the bomb expert asked.

Marcus Taylor paled.

"For very obvious reasons," he said. "If Jarrod's embezzlement came to light, every client we have would demand an audit of his account. If that happens the accounts Jarrod stole from would be uncovered and our investors would, quite naturally, expect immediate return of their money. Jarrod obviously cannot repay it, having squandered it; therefore, we three, as equal partners, are bound responsible."

"If the amount of Jarrod's thefts reach the proportions we fear, then

it would be practically impossible for us to repay the sums all at once. To go to the police now would mean not only business suicide but probably criminal prosecution as well."

Marcus Taylor paused momentarily, and then went on. "On the other hand, if we were to repay the amount of the thefts slowly, over a balanced period of time—which is what we must do anyway—and then were to go to the police, the scandal itself would be enough to ruin Marginal, Incorporated. And God knows how much more money Jarrod might steal by then."

"Quite interesting," the bomb expert said.

"And so you can see," Marcus Taylor said, "we have had but one recourse opened to us. I'm sure you can readily understand why we want this matter disposed of with the utmost caution and speed."

"Certainly," the bomb expert said. He then asked Marcus Taylor to tell him everything he knew about Lawrence Jarrod's habits.

Taylor related all the information he knew or could remember. Jarrod was more or less a solitary man. He did not have any particular hobbies, other than women, which is quite a hobby in itself. He spent most of his evenings at the expensive bistros and elite clubs along the Beach.

His male friends numbered a few. He belonged to a private club, which he rarely attended, main-

tained an expensive bachelor suite at one of the leading downtown hotels, and owned a cabin at Bass Lake, which he retired to occasionally on weekends, either going alone or bringing along one of his many female companions to, Marcus Taylor supposed drily, steady the boat while he cast into the reeds for black bass.

When Taylor had finished, the bomb expert nodded silently to himself and smiled. He studied his brandy.

Oliver Jaynes said, "Have you thought of something?"

"Possibly," the bomb expert said. "I must work out the details, however."

"How will you do it?" Jaynes asked, a bit nervously.

"I rather think you wouldn't want to know that," the bomb expert said. "It would be to your advantage if the news of Mr. Jarrod's demise came as a complete surprise."

"I presume you will not do anything as obvious as wiring a bomb to the ignition of his car," Jaynes said.

The bomb expert winced. "My dear sir," he said in a patronizing tone, "I am not a throwback to the days of Prohibition. I am a sensitive and prideful man. I am an artist at my trade. The key to my success lies in originality. True, I employ the use of explosives, hence my *sobriquet*. But there all similarity ends between myself and the

unimaginative dolts who wire dynamite caps to automobile ignitions and conceal homemade bombs inside birthday presents. I am an imaginative man.

"I have committed eleven murders in my career, gentlemen, and each one of them has been completely different, completely successful, even brilliant, if I may say so, in their creativity. There has never been so much as a single whisper of suspicion after any of those eleven murders."

Marcus Taylor was duly impressed. "It will look like an accident, then?"

"But of course."

"How soon will you be able to expedite matters?"

"That is difficult to say," the bomb expert told him. "I must, as I said before, work out certain details. However, I should think somewhere within two weeks, if that is satisfactory."

"Quite satisfactory."

The bomb expert rose. "Gentlemen," he said, "it has been indeed a pleasure." Solemnly, he walked first to Marcus Taylor, then to Clayton Searles, then to Oliver Jaynes, shaking each man's hand in turn. He then walked to the door, opened it, and turned. "You shall hear from me presently," he said, and the door shut gently behind him.

The three men sat in silence, staring at the closed door. Oliver Jaynes said finally, "He's mad, do

you know? The man is obviously quite mad."

"Perhaps," Marcus Taylor said. "But somehow I don't think so."

"A madman," Jaynes insisted. "We'll all sit in the gas chamber."

"For God's sake, Ollie," Searles said.

"Even if he were mad," Marcus Taylor said, "don't make the mistake of associating madness with idiocy. Whatever else our Mr. Smith is, he is also very shrewd and very calculating."

"Too damned shrewd and calculating, if you ask me," Jaynes said.

"Yes," Marcus Taylor said musily. "Maybe he is."

THE PRIVATE PHONE in Marcus Taylor's study rang at nine o'clock in the evening, one week and four days later. Taylor put down the investment study he had been reading and answered it.

"Mr. Taylor?"

He recognized the voice immediately. "Yes?"

"I suggest," the bomb expert said, "that you and your associates play a round of golf Saturday morning."

"Saturday morning?"

"Nine o'clock," the bomb expert said. "Eighteen holes."

"Couldn't we make it nine? My legs are not what—"

"Eighteen holes," the bomb expert repeated firmly.

"Very well."

"I would also suggest that you add a fourth party."

"That can be arranged."

"Excellent," the bomb expert said. "I should like to see you Monday evening, then. To conclude our business transaction."

"My home?"

"If that is acceptable."

"Yes."

"Seven-thirty?"

"You will be expected."

"Good-by, Mr. Taylor," the bomb expert said. "I hope that you enjoy a fine round of golf."

As it happened, Marcus Taylor was not enjoying a fine round of golf.

They had just left the fourteenth tee at Cypress Park, and he had sliced his drive into the rough for the sixth consecutive hole. He was two strokes down to Oliver Jaynes, who was an intensely poor golfer, and six strokes in the arrears of both Clayton Searles and the fourth member of the group, an influential client named Samuel Younger.

Taylor had taken, throughout the morning, a plentiful amount of good-natured ribbing from Samuel Younger, and that had not done much to enhance his humor. As well, he could not concentrate on his game, try as he would. He had wondered at first how Jaynes and Searles could play as well as they were, but then he saw that both were playing mechanically, not even attempting to concentrate; which was of course, the secret.

Jaynes, in fact, was perspiring so freely that it seemed someone had sprayed him top to bottom with a lawn sprinkler.

Now the four men, with their caddies, walked down the fairway toward the fourteenth green. One hundred and twenty yards along, Marcus Taylor, his caddy in tow, went off into a clump of gnarled cypress and followed the edge of a small creek. This was where he had hooked his tee shot.

It took him several minutes to find his ball. When he did locate it, he saw that it was embedded in the soft, spongy grass that grew on the bank of the creek. Directly in front of him were the cypress trees, grown thickly together, and the only open path he could see that led anywhere near the fourteenth green was neatly guarded by a large sand trap.

Grumbling, Marcus Taylor bent, retrieved his ball, straightened, and threw it as high and as far as he could, over the top of the cypress trees, and onto the fairway. He turned, fixing his gaze on his caddy. The boy was glancing innocent-ly in the opposite direction.

When Taylor returned to the fairway, he noticed that one of the small, yellow, motorized golf carts used by the employees of Cypress Park had drawn up near the fourteenth green. He could see Jaynes, Searles and Samuel Younger grouped around it. As he approached, the golf carts, with one

of the clubhouse attendants driving, turned and started back.

Marcus Taylor walked up to the three men, who stood in silence. One look at their faces, especially that of Samuel Younger, told him everything he needed to know. But he said, "What's going on here? Looks like you've all seen a ghost."

They turned to look at him. "It's Lawrence Jarrod," Samuel Younger said, his face ashen.

"What about him?"

"He's dead!"

"Dead?" Marcus Taylor said, properly shocked. "Dead?"

"I can't believe it either, Marc," Clayton Searles said somberly.

"What happened?"

"An accident," Oliver Jaynes said. "A horrible, freakish accident. Jarrod had gone alone up to his cabin at Bass Lake for the weekend. You know he often goes up there, Marc."

"Yes, yes," Taylor said, eyes wide.

"Well, it seems the hot water heater exploded," Jaynes said. "Too much pressure or something. He was killed outright."

"Poor Larry," Marcus Taylor said, shaking his head sadly.

He wondered if it would be more appropriate to wear his black sharkskin, or his black Italian silk, to the funeral.

"Tell me, Mr. Smith," Marcus Taylor said the following Monday night, when the bomb expert had made himself comfortable, "how

did you arrange the explosion of the hot water heater?"

"Trade secret," the bomb expert said with a smile in the direction of Taylor.

"However you did it, I must admit it was superbly carried off. Accidental death; no doubt whatsoever in anyone's mind."

"As I said during my first visit," the bomb expert told him, "I take great pride in my work. When I undertake to do a job, it is done exactly as promised."

"Well," Marcus Taylor said, "you have certainly earned your fee." From the pocket of the black sharkskin suit he had worn to Lawrence Jarrod's funeral that afternoon, he withdrew a large, folded brown envelope. He stood and placed the envelope on the table next to the chair which the bomb expert occupied. "Ten thousand dollars."

The bomb expert did not touch the envelope. He extracted a cigar from his shirt pocket and lit it carefully. He examined the glowing end.

"Gentlemen," he said at length, "I am afraid I have a confession to make at this time."

Marcus Taylor gave him a puzzle look. "Confession?"

"Yes," the bomb expert said. "I have engaged in a bit of deception at your expense."

"Deception?"

"For the purpose of expediency, you see."



"I do not see," Marcus Taylor told him.

The bomb expert continued to study the end of his cigar. "I will require an additional ten thousand dollars."

"What?" Oliver Jaynes exploded. He started out of his chair.

A tiny muscle began to quiver in Marcus Taylor's neck. It was a sign of quiet and mounting rage, a sign which both Jaynes and Searles had come to know quite well over the years. And when Marcus Taylor glanced sideways at him, Jaynes sat back in his chair and said nothing else. The room was completely silent.

"Gentlemen?" the bomb expert said finally.

"We have agreed on a price," Marcus Taylor said in a rigidly controlled voice. "Ten thousand dollars."

"I am very well aware of that fact, Mr. Taylor," the bomb expert said. He smiled pointedly.

"You will not get one penny more than ten thousand dollars."

"But I am afraid you have no choice."

"Haven't we?"

"Not actually," the bomb expert said. "If you do not pay, I will go to the police. Anonymously, of course."

"They would not believe you."

"Possibly not. But they would make an investigation."

"And find nothing," Marcus Taylor said. "Witness your own bragadocio."

The bomb expert smiled again. He was obviously enjoying himself. "If I were to tell the police exactly how I arranged the explosion, I am sure they would be inclined to agree that it was murder and *not* an accident."

"They could prove nothing."

"Perhaps not," the bomb expert said. "But think of the scandal a murder investigation would cause. Equally as big a scandal, if not bigger, than one caused by embezzlement, don't you agree?"

"By God, it's blackmail!" Oliver Jaynes raged. He could no longer control himself. His face was chalk white.

"Come, come," the bomb expert said. "I dislike that word. Let us say it is merely a last minute increase in prices."

"What guarantee do we have that ten thousand dollars will be the last of it?" Marcus Taylor asked carefully spacing his words.

"None," the bomb expert said. "Except my word, of course."

"I suppose all of your previous clients were subjected to this last minute increase as well," Marcus Taylor said acidly.

"One exploits opportunity wherever one can," the bomb expert said with a wave of his hand.

"You realize, of course, that I do not have an additional ten thousand dollars on hand."

"But you can easily raise that much by tomorrow, I am sure."

"I suppose so, yes."

"That will be fine," the bomb expert said. "I shall pay you one more visit tomorrow evening. Shall we say eight o'clock? I will collect the entire twenty thousand at that time." His smile flashed again. "I trust you completely, gentlemen."

He rose and went to the door. Turning there, he said, "One cautioning word of advice, if I may. I have taken the precaution of entrusting in the hands of an associate the complete details of our transaction, which will be forwarded to the district attorney of this city immediately upon my death by any other than natural means. May I suggest you do not do anything rash, such as attempting to have me eliminated?"

When he was gone, Oliver Jaynes went to the bar and drank three shots of brandy and then came back and sat down and put his head in his hands.

"I knew it," he moaned. "I knew something would happen. If you had listened to me when I—"

"Shut up, Ollie," Marcus Taylor said.

Jaynes shut up.

Clayton Searles said, "What are we going to do, Marc?"

"What can we do?" Marcus Taylor said. "We pay him."

"If we pay him this time, we'll be paying him for the rest of our lives. You know that, Marc."

"You heard what he said about the record of our transaction," Marcus Taylor told him. "Do we have any alternative?"

When the bomb expert paid his third visit to Marcus Taylor's home the following evening, he was ushered into the den by Oliver Jaynes and shown to his customary chair.

"A glass of brandy?" Marcus Taylor asked him when he was seated.

"Yes, thank you," the bomb expert said graciously.

Clayton Searles brought him a brandy. He sniffed it. "Rather an odd aroma," he said, holding the snifter up to the light.

"A new, rare brand I have just received from France," Marcus Taylor said.

"Hmm," the bomb expert said, sipping some of the brandy. "Very nice."

They sat in silence, waiting. When his glass was empty, the bomb expert placed it on the table and laced his fingers together. "And now, gentlemen," he said, "my twenty thousand dollars."

"I am afraid," Marcus Taylor

said, "that we have decided not to pay you."

The bomb expert frowned momentarily. The frown, then, was replaced by a slow and indulgent smile. "I have already informed you of the consequences if you do not."

"Yes," Marcus Taylor said, "you have."

"And you still refuse to pay?"

"That is correct."

"Then you leave me no choice but to—"

The bomb expert broke off. He put both hands on the arms of the chair, and started to rise. He seemed to have no strength and sank down again.

"Strange," he said in a cottony voice, shaking his head. "I seem to feel somewhat dizzy."

The three partners sat in silence, watching him.

The bomb expert rubbed a hand across his eyes. His vision blurred, and the room seemed to swim surrealistically. Comprehension came to him then, and he tried once again to lift himself from the chair. "The brandy . . ." he said, and slumped forward, his chin touching his chest.

"Well," Marcus Taylor said, rising slowly. "Let's get on with it, shall we?"

THE ROOM WAS small, furnished only with a bed, a small vanity, a nightstand, and a single, wooden chair, placed in the center of the

room, to which the bomb expert was now tied quite securely with a length of rope.

They waited, standing before him, for the effects of the chloral hydrate Clayton Searles had carefully mixed with the bomb expert's brandy to wear off.

The bomb expert stirred, his head lifting from his chest. He seemed to have some trouble orienting himself. He shook his head several times, his eyes opening. He felt the rope encircling his body and struggled vainly against it for a moment.

When his mind cleared and his vision returned, he saw the three men standing before him. Mr. Smith studied their faces, cold and impassive.

"That was really very foolish, gentlemen," the bomb expert said in a thick voice. "What do you hope to accomplish by all this?"

They said nothing. Marcus Taylor, standing in front of the small vanity, moved aside. There was a long, thin box on its top, to the front of which was affixed an ordinary alarm clock. Several wires ran from the rear of the clock, disappearing into the box. The ticking of the clock seemed quite loud in the stillness of the room.

The bomb expert's eyes widened. "What is *that*?"

"What do you suppose it is?" Marcus Taylor said in a chill voice.

The bomb expert smiled. "Really now," he said. "You don't ex-

pect me to believe that is a *bomb*, do you?"

"You may believe what you like," Marcus Taylor said. "However that is exactly what it is."

"Absurd," the bomb expert said. "How could the three of you devise a bomb?"

"If I recall correctly," Clayton Searles said, "it was you who said that any dolt could make one. Really very simple, as I'm sure you know. An alarm clock, wire, two or three sticks of dynamite, a detonating cap, the last two of which we obtained from a friend who owns a construction business, ostensibly to clear away some tree stumps."

"Just what do you intend to do?"

"That should be quite evident," Marcus Taylor said.

"And rather fitting, too, don't you think?" Oliver Jaynes said. "A bomb expert dying in an explosion from a homemade bomb. Really quite ironic."

"I think," the bomb expert said, "that you're bluffing."

"Are we?" Marcus Taylor asked.

"Of course," the bomb expert said. "If you kill me, you will be signing your own death warrant. As I told you, in the event of my death, a complete record of Lawrence Jarrod's murder will be turned over to the district attorney."

"Perhaps it is you who is bluffing," Marcus Taylor said.

"I doubt if you would be willing to risk that."

"On the contrary," Marcus Tay-

lor said, 'we are quite willing to risk it under the circumstances. We are faced with an impossible situation. We must make restitution for Lawrence Jarrod's thefts of Marginal, Incorporated monies, and we cannot do that if we must pay blackmail to you. However, if you are dead, and you are bluffing—'

"But I'm not bluffing," the bomb expert said congenially. "By the way, how would you explain my death?"

"We would not have to," Marcus Taylor said. "We are now in a small caretaker's cottage on the rear perimeter of my property. I doubt very seriously if an explosion, and such a small one is all that is required, would even be heard. The nearest neighbor is more than two miles away."

The bomb expert seemed to be enjoying himself now. "And the—ah—remains?"

"Quite simple for us to clear away all traces," Clayton Searles said. "Two or three weekends, a small fire, perhaps a bulldozer to turn over the land afterwards." He shrugged.

"I see," the bomb expert said, nodding. "So my fate is sealed, is it?"

"Not necessarily," Marcus Taylor said. "We are reasonable men. We actually have no desire to commit murder, at least not again. We can offer you one alternative."

"I rather thought so," the bomb expert said. "Go on."



We have discovered your real identity from your belongings. A driver's license with your picture on it, and an accurate description of you, so that we have no doubt as to your true name. We have drawn up a complete confession, in which you state that you murdered Lawrence Jarrod. If you will sign that confession, it will be locked away in the company vault, where it need never be opened. Except, of course, in the event I or either of my partners were to die, violently. Then it would go to the proper authorities."

The bomb expert smiled. "A stalemate, as it were. Each of us has damning evidence on the other."

"Precisely," Marcus Taylor said. "Our paths would never cross again."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," the bomb expert said sadly, "your little game is extremely transparent. There is obviously no bomb in that box. However, I give you credit for the attempt, meager as it is. I ad-

mit I was rather miffed at first, but I do enjoy imaginative people. If you will kindly untie me now and admit the failure of your scheme, I shall forget it ever happened. But if you persist, I have no choice but to raise the price once again. To thirty thousand dollars."

"Then you refuse to sign the confession?"

"Of course," the bomb expert said. "Do you realize the vulnerability of my position if I do? Suppose your safe were broken into, or someone, quite by accident, opened the confession? Or suppose one of you were to meet a violent death, by accident perhaps, and the letter was turned over to the authorities? Even though I were quite innocent, I would nevertheless suffer the consequences."

"No, gentlemen, in view of these reasons, and of the fact that I simply cannot believe that you have a bomb in that box, I must call your bluff."

Marcus Taylor looked at the dial on the alarm clock. "It is now ten minutes to ten. The bomb will be triggered by the alarm at exactly ten o'clock. Three minutes before the hour, the three of us will leave, allowing ample time to get safely away."

"You have until that time, eight minutes from now, to change your mind."

"I implore you to dispense with this ruse immediately," the bomb expert said. "Otherwise, I am

afraid you will be financially rather sorry."

Marcus Taylor sighed. "And I implore you," he said, "to sign the confession before it is too late."

"It seems," the bomb expert said, "that we have already reached a stalemate. And my price, at one minute past ten, will be forty thousand dollars."

"Very well," Marcus Taylor said. "It is, as they say, your funeral."

The bomb expert chuckled appreciatively.

Five minutes passed. The hands of the alarm clock showed five of ten. The bomb expert sat relaxed, watching the three men standing before him. Oliver Jaynes fidgeted nervously.

Another minute ticked off.

"You're determined to carry this through, aren't you?" the bomb expert said.

"One minute," Marcus Taylor said. "Have you decided to listen to reason?"

"Have you?" the bomb expert asked him.

The clock showed three minutes of ten.

"Time to go," Marcus Taylor said to Jaynes and Searles.

They started for the door.

"Still hoping, eh?" the bomb expert said. "You stand outside the door and wait for my screams of mercy. It really isn't necessary, you know."

"It is not too late to change your

nind," Marcus Taylor said. "I really wish you would."

"Two and one half minutes to en," the bomb expert said. "Hadn't you better be leaving?"

Marcus Taylor shrugged and opened the door. The three men stepped outside. Just before he closed the door, Taylor heard the bomb expert laughing softly.

They began to walk away from the cottage, following a narrow stone path that led into a copse of trees that grew on Marcus Taylor's property. Entering there, the three men stopped. They could not see the cottage from where they were clustered.

Marcus Taylor looked at his watch. "Ten o'clock," he said.

The explosion was not as loud as he had expected it to be.

There was a quick reddish flash of light as the dynamite in the box exploded, and muffled roar that sounded more like a clap of thunder than a bomb detonating. And then it became quiet again.

Marcus Taylor shook his head sadly. "Too bad," he said. "I was actually hoping he would come to us senses and sign the confession."

"Yes, so was I," Clayton Searles said. "You know, I rather liked him."

"Should we go back for a look?" Oliver Jaynes asked with a small hudder.

"I don't think that is necessary," Marcus Taylor said. "There will be

time enough for that chore at a later date."

They began to walk through the trees.

"Do you really think there is a record of our contract to murder Lawrence Jarrod ready to be turned over to the district attorney, Marc? I mean, we could—"

"We discussed that previously," Marcus Taylor told him. "If you remember, we decided that no such document exists. And even if it did, there will be no body to corroborate to the friend that the bomb expert is indeed dead. After all, if you were such a friend, and held such a document, and the person who entrusted that document suddenly disappeared, would you immediately turn it over to the authorities?"

"I think not. Suppose the bomb expert had merely gone away for a period of time without telling the friend, and then returned to find he had been exposed as a professional murderer? Such thoughts would naturally be uppermost in this friend's mind, don't you think?"

"I suppose you're right," Jaynes said.

"And another thing," Searles said. "Even if this alleged document was turned over to the district attorney, there would be no way that Jarrod's death could be proved murder. It is now listed officially as an accident. True, an investigation might possibly be investigated, and would no doubt harm

Marginal, Incorporated, but we could never be brought to trial solely on the basis of a single unverified document.

"The friend, of course, could not come forward for fear of implication. Therefore, all the police would have is that document, meaningless in itself. The entire thing would probably be written off as a prank."

"Exactly," Marcus Taylor said. "The bomb expert made the mistake of assuming the mere mention of such a document would be sufficient to frighten us from taking any definite action. It was, on his part, a rather costly error."

The three men reached the rear of Marcus Taylor's home. Taylor paused there, frowning reflectively.

"Hmm," he said.

"What is it, Marc?" Searles asked him.

"I was just thinking," Taylor said, "how very simple it was to

devise that bomb once we had the component parts. Really not very difficult."

"Any dolt could do it," Searles said with a smile.

"Yes," Marcus Taylor said thoughtfully.

"You're pondering something," Oliver Jaynes said. "What is it, Marc?"

"Well," Marcus Taylor said, "we are going to have to pay back Jarrod's thefts, as you well know, and within a reasonably short period of time. Financially, this is going to leave us in a rather precarious position. We certainly could use some additional funds, don't you gentlemen agree?"

Oliver Jaynes' jaw dropped. "Marc! You're not thinking—"

"Yes," Marcus Taylor said. "Yes, I am. I think it's high time we branched out into newer and possibly more profitable interests. Shall we go inside and discuss it?"

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May—1968

THE OBVIOUS WAY OUT

*He'd forgotten one thing about
his cowed class. Boys and girls
can hate—and hate can kill . . .*

by RICHARD O. LEWIS

PROFESSOR PONTIER looked down upon his class, the embers of open contempt glowing in his little black eyes. Composition III. Twenty-one students. Twenty-one defiant numbskulls! Twenty-one morons!

He hated them for their stupid manner of attire, for their atrocious hair styles, for their total rejection of the knowledge he had attempted to impart to them. Hoodlums, the whole lot of them!

But this day, the last day of the semester, he would show them a thing or two. He would show them that he, after all, was their master. He would drop a bombshell among

them that would shake them to their very senseless foundations!

In the front row at his far left, sat Millie Adams. She was a shy little girl with brown curls, a pinched face, and a smoldering intelligence that seemed, in some manner, to be locked up tightly with no outward means of expression.

Among them all—according to Pontier's way of thinking—she was the only one who presented a decent decor. Perhaps that, along with her shyness and apparent unworldliness, was the reason why Pontier had, a month ago, offered to give her private tutoring in writ-



ing—in a fatherly manner, of course.

Hesitantly, she had accepted the offer. But during the second evening meeting, when Professor Pontier had let his hand fall upon her knee, reassuringly—in a fatherly manner, of course—she had suddenly tensed. And as the hand

tightened upon her, her tenseness increased until she shot from her chair like a released coil spring and sped out of the room into the dark hall, her cheap skirt ripped at one of the seams.

Now, as Professor Pontier's eyes swept in her direction, she quickly averted her gaze in precisely the

same manner as she had been doing every day since her precipitous flight.

The professor looked intently at each student in turn, tossed his bifocals, and put them on with a flourish. His eyes popped out immediately to near normal size.

"None of you," he stated flatly, "has shown sufficient aptitude or progress during this semester to merit a grade."

Someone in the back of the room groaned. That would be Bill Sommes. He wore his blond hair close cropped and sported a flowing mustache of yellow. Lately, he had developed a habit of groaning at nearly every statement the professor made.

"You will groan the louder," snapped Pontier, "when you get your final report Monday and discover the *F* you have earned in this course!"

Bill Sommes had never gotten along very well in class. Early in the semester, he had made the grave error of asking the professor how many short stories *he* had ever had published.

Momentary fear had shown in Professor Pontier's little eyes. Although he had been teaching short story writing for a number of years in various colleges, teaching seemed to have had little, if any, effect or beneficial bearing upon his own literary attempts.

But he had a ready answer:

"True literature comes from the

heart of the writer; it comes from his soul; it comes from the very core of the individual; it is, in truth, the offspring of his brain; it is his ultimate gesture."

Pontier loved semicolons, and any manuscript submitted, if not abundantly littered with them, was considered a weak brain child, indeed, with no meat on its rickety bones. "To me, the selling of a child of the brain is akin to infanticide. Therefore, I have never placed an infant of my own on the sacrificial altar of Moloch."

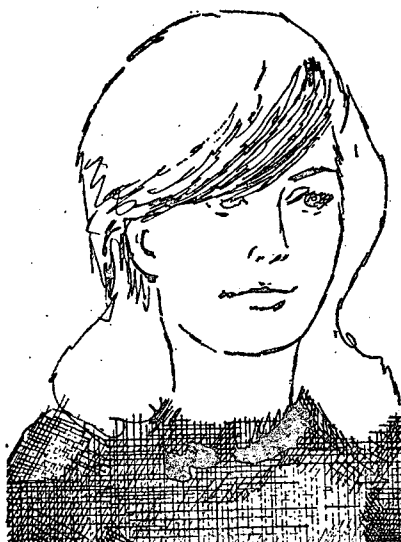
And that was when Bill Sommes had emitted his first groan.

"This week end," Pontier pointed out, "I shall complete my reports; the grades will be in the office Monday morning. All grades are below passing. Not one of you —" He paused, glaring down at them, knowing that he had the whip hand at last. "Not one of you, I repeat, has shown sufficient progress to merit a semester credit!"

"But, Professor Pontier!" blurted Connie Connor, a tall girl with long blonde hair that fell, uncombed, to her shoulders. "That is unfair! We have all worked hard—"

"Ha!" snapped Pontier. "It is rather obvious that you failed to take into consideration the numerous mistakes I pointed out on your submissions!"

"But we can't *all* be stupid!" shouted Ted Reeves, a tall fellow with a thin, acne-blotted face, the



left half of which was hidden by a dangling loop of black hair in which he was toying with a pencil. "You can't flunk all of us!"

"Ha!" said Pontier. "This was precisely what he had expected; he had dangled the bait; they had begun to nibble. Soon he would convince them of their stupidity; he would show them that they could never hope to match his own ingenuity; he would teach them a greater respect.

"I shall prove to you presently that you cannot advance even the most obvious solution to a literary problem." He glared at them again. "I shall challenge the combined—er—brain power of all of you; I shall bring forth your stupidity so that even the most obtuse of you cannot fail to recognize it!"

The class sat in moody silence.

"First, I shall ask you a very simple question." Pontier took off his horn-rimmed glasses and folded them so that he might use them in the flourishing gestures that were sure to come. "Now, just what is the basic element in short story writing?" He paused, knowing full well the answer they would give him.

Millie Adams raised her hand part way, then shyly let it drop again and turned her eyes away as Pontier's gaze swept in her direction.

Ted Reeves took the pencil out of his black hair and held it up.

Pontier gestured recognition with his glasses. "Yes, Mr. Reeves?"

"I know you have been trying to teach us a lot of tripe," said Reeves, "but I believe that the class as a whole still maintains that suspense is one of the major factors."

Pontier could hardly keep the little smile from twisting the corners of his thin lips. Things were coming along nicely.

"Suspense is only for cheap thrillers," he said. "That shows quite definitely that you have not accepted my teachings. However, I shall go along with that answer, provided you can give me a definite and concrete example."

Reeves scratched his head with his pencil, then raised it again. "Well, you get the protagonist—the hero—into some kind of mess. The

greater the mess you get him into, the greater the suspense."

Pontier felt the corners of his mouth twist tighter. "Does anyone have anything further to add?"

Bill Sommes slumped upward in his seat, almost to a sitting position.

"You get the hero sewed up so tight," he said, "that the reader can't figure out how he can possibly escape his predicament. Then, at the climax, you get him out in a manner that should have been obvious to the reader all the time, but wasn't."

"Ah, yes." Pontier wheeled to the chalk board behind him and drew a horizontal line. Beneath the line and perpendicular to it he drew a cylinder. "This," he said, indicating the cylinder, "is a well. And here—" He drew a stick man at the bottom of the cylinder. "—is your hero at the bottom of the well." He wheeled to face the class again. "Now, *you get your hero out of the well!* And, remember, it must be done in such a manner as to be immediately *obvious* to all present!"

Ted Reeves raised his pencil.

Pontier pointed his glasses.

"Is there any water in the well?"

"Not a drop."

"He could scream for help until—until someone heard him," suggested blonde Connie, crossing her legs so that her mini-skirt drew far up above her plump knees.

"It is a well at an abandoned farm," said Pontier. "It would be a

miracle if anyone heard his cries before the poor fellow grew too hoarse to utter them further."

"He could reach out to either side of the wall with his hands and feet, spread-eagle-like," said Bill Sommes, "and by pressing on each side, crawfish his way up."

"The well is an inch or so too wide for that," cut in Pontier.

Millie Adams raised a timid hand and was quickly granted acknowledgement. "Well, he could take off his clothes—some of them, I mean—and tear them into strips. Then he could tie the strips together to form a rope with a noose at the end."

"It would be quite interesting," said Pontier, "to watch you perform the experiment!" He waited expectantly for the laughter. It didn't come. Millie's face had turned bright crimson to the roots of her hair.

"Anyway," he continued, "there is a physical law which dictates that when anything is tossed straight up, as would be necessary in a well, it would fall straight down again; therefore to no avail." In a way, he felt sorry for Millie; shy and innocent; not at all like the others. If only she had been more—

"What kind of walls does the well have?" asked moonfaced Manny Brown. His yellow hair, cut in bangs, hung down as far as the bottom of his eyebrows.

"A pig, grunting from beneath a

straw stack," thought Pontier. Aloud, he said, "Cemented native stone."

"He could find finger holds and toe holds . . ."

"There are none."

"He could pry some stones loose and make finger and toe holds . . ."

"There is nothing with which to pry; there is nothing with which to dig into the cement."

"He could dig into the bottom of the well with his fingers," said Bill Sommes, "and tunnel under a wall. Then starting at the bottom, he could kick the stones loose . . ."

"The floor resists his fingers; it is bone dry."

There was a silence. Pontier looked smugly out and over the class, scarcely able to conceal the self-satisfaction that was leaping within him. They had fallen neatly into the little trap he had set for them.

Bill Sommes began to raise his hand, thought better of it, and let it fall listlessly to his desk.

"I'm getting to the place where I don't care much if he gets out or stays," grunted the pig in the straw stack.

"*Ha!*" pounced Pontier. "Then you have not even developed a sympathetic character; one with whom you care to identify!"

Bill Sommes groaned again and made a helpless gesture in Ted Reeves' direction. Reeves took the pencil out of his hair and bit off the end of it. Connie Connor took her

right leg off her left knee, swooped her left leg over her right knee, and twisted her lips as if she had suddenly discovered something distasteful in her mouth.

"You see!" chortled Pontier. "You see! Not one of you has the intelligence to note the obvious!"

Reeves spat out pieces of chewed pencil. "All right," he said, finally. "All right. *You* get him out."

"*Ha!*" shouted Pontier, triumph glowing in his little eyes. Fairly dancing with excitement, he wheeled suddenly about, clutched up an eraser from the chalk board, and—with a grand flourish—eliminated the stick man from the well with a single swipe. "*Voilà!*" he cried, wheeling back to face the class. "There you are!"

Fiery anger leaped into Connie Connor's green eyes. "Well, of all the damned cheap dirty tricks."

Bill Sommes' groans, along with the groans of others, were cut into by the sound of the buzzer that ended the class period. Most of the class members stamped angrily out, muttering. The remaining six gathered belligerently before Pontier's desk.

"The six of us are English majors," said Bill Sommes, his yellow mustache fairly bristling. "I hope you know what that means! It means that if we don't pass Composition III, we'll not receive credit for Composition I and II!"

"It means that we'll have to repeat the course!" said Connie. "It

will delay our graduation a full semester! Maybe more!"

"Some of us cannot afford that," said Millie Adams.

"An *F* will not look good," said Manny, "in one's chosen field!"

"Ha!" shouted Pontier. "Now you come begging! You should have tried harder."

"Nuts!" Ted Reeves shouted. "You've been trying to give us some kind of junk from Never-Never Land!"

"Morons!" screamed Pontier. "I do not give grades to morons!"

"Why, you—" Bill Sommes balled a fist and drew back a heavy arm.

Pontier pointed his glasses at him. "You prove my point, young man. The unintelligent always resort to the primitive when—"

Daniel Bromath laid a quick, firm hand on Bill Sommes' arm and pushed it down. He was a tall, silent fellow who was accustomed to making straight *A*'s in all his courses. He wore thick glasses and—almost, but not quite—a chin beard.

"Getting your fist bloody will not raise your grade," he said, softly. "Let us take the professor's teachings to heart. Let us look for the obvious solution. Perhaps this time we shall be more fortunate in finding it."

Millie Adams did not shift her gaze when Pontier's fell upon her, and he could not tell whether the light in her eyes was one of utter

loathing or of capitulation. He hoped it was the latter; there was still time.

ALONE IN HIS shabby room that night, Pontier was pouring over his grade sheets and records. He had the weekend in which to complete the task, but he wanted to get most of it over with while he was still in the proper frame of mind. He would show those hoodlums once for all that their stupidity and arrogance would get them nowhere, that his teaching was not to be laughed at.

He had been working for a little more than two hours when he heard the gentle tapping at his door. Millie! He took off his glasses, pushed back his chair, and took a hesitant step forward.

"Yes?" he said, his voice suddenly husky. "Who is it?"

The door swung open, and two men stepped quickly inside. They were wearing grotesque Halloween masks.

Pontier stumbled backwards, quick fear twisting his face. "Who—What do you want?"

The door slammed shut as the men sprang forward. One of them pinned Pontier's arms to his sides. The other shoved a black hood over his head.

"What—" And then, as terror struck him: "Help!"

Something that could have been only a fish hit him in the jaw.

"Keep your mouth shut," said a

gruff voice, "or I'll fix it so you won't be able to open it for a long time!"

Pontier felt himself being dragged roughly out of the window and on to the lawn. Minutes later, he was in the back seat of a car, and the car was speeding away through the night. He could feel that there were two people in the seat with him, one on each side. He sensed that there were two, probably three more in the front seat.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked, timorously.

There was no answer.

He smelled a subtle aroma and realized that it was the kind of perfume Connie Connors wore to class almost daily.

"If—if it's about the grades," he ventured, his voice raspy and scarcely above a whisper. "Maybe I can—"

The silence was broken only by the sound of the car gliding along over the smooth highway.

Ten or fifteen minutes later, the car veered abruptly to the right and began bouncing and jolting slowly along what must have been a rutted country road. Then it came to a halt, doors swung open, and Pontier felt himself being dragged out. His feet scarcely touched the ground as two men whisked him along, but he could tell that the area was littered and weed-grown. Then they halted, and the hood was removed from his head.

Remote stars lit the sky. Pontier

could see only the tall weeds about him, the two masked men at his side, and dimmer shadows in the background. Hands suddenly clutched his arms and lifted him upward and forward, and he caught sight of the yawning blackness directly beneath him.

"No! No!" he shouted, his legs kicking and writhing in the murkiness that was slowly engulfing him. "No! Please!"

He screamed as the hands, now holding his wrists, lowered him deeper and deeper into the awful pit. He screamed again as the hands suddenly released him to let him go plummeting downward.

The second scream ended abruptly as his feet struck solidly and joltingly with a force that threw him forward to his knee. He regained his footing frantically and stood in a petrified position, fearful that a move in any direction might precipitate him into an even greater abyss.

"Let me out!" he shouted. "Get me out of here! You can't leave me here like this!"

"The way out is obvious," said a voice from above.

"You will have ample time to find it," said another voice.

Slow footsteps died away into the distance.

"Hoodlums!" Pontier screamed after them. "You'll pay for this! Get me out!"

He heard the car start and heard it go bumping away. Then the si-

lence of the night closed in, and he shattered the silence again and again with his screams.

Finally, his voice growing hoarse, he realized that his cries for help were doing no good. He was undoubtedly at some abandoned farm.

But he would get out! Some way! And when he did, he would see that they got what was coming to them! Assault and battery! Intimidation! Kidnaping! He would go to the limit of the law! He would certainly show them!

Hesitantly, he reached a hand outward into the blackness, fearful lest something strike out at him or that some slithering thing might coil itself about him.

His hand touched the rough stone of a circular wall. Yes, he was in a well. There was little doubt of that. He reached quickly out to each side with his hands and feet and tried to crawfish his way up. He ascended scarcely a laborious foot before sliding back again, his muscles strained and cramped. He realized that the walls were a few inches too far apart for the maneuver to be successful.

He scratched blindly at the walls with his fingers, seeking protruding stones that would offer him a purchase. He found a few such stones, but they availed him little. He could not sustain his weight with the fingers of one hand while reaching upward with the fingers of the other. He tried to wrench the stones

free, and found that they were firmly cemented together.

Gingerly, he explored the bottom of the pit with the toes of his shoes. The bottom was a soft muck of damp and decayed vegetation.

What was it Bill Sommes had said? Something about digging a tunnel beneath the wall. Yes, that was it. Then kicking the stones out, one by one. . . .

He fell to his knees and began clawing at the muck near the stones that formed the wall. Hope surged within him as he felt the debris yield slowly but surely to his efforts. He deepened the hole, widened it, and felt the knees of his trousers become damp and clammy.

He rested awhile, his fingers sore and numb from their unaccustomed labor. Then he fell to work again, clawing, digging, scooping. And the wall of cemented stones continued downward. His digging became frenzied. How deep? How long. . . .

The fingernails of one hand broke sharply against a solid substance. He clawed again—and broke more fingernails. Concrete!

He sat back on his heels and wrung his muck-soiled hands, realizing that his prison was not—as he had first thought—a well; it was a *cistern*, a storage place for precious rain water. It had been made water tight with cemented walls and floor so that the rain water, brought from the roof by a system of



troughs and spouting, would form a reservoir for use during periods of drought. The muck in the bottom was an accumulation of leaves, twigs, and other debris that had been brought along, through the years, from the roof of the house. But the spouting had long ago rusted away, and the cistern had slowly gone dry.

Pontier sat and pondered and looked up once at the circle of stars that hung above him, billions of miles remote. Suddenly he remembered something that Millie Adams had said, something about tearing clothing into strips and making a rope.

He got quickly to his feet, bent over, grasped the cuff of a trouser leg, and pulled. The tough fabric held firm. Then he remembered something else. Something about when a thing is tossed straight up, it comes straight down again.

He sank wearily to sit upon his heels again, beaten.

Then, slowly, the obvious answer came to him. He had known

the answer all the time, but now he must face it openly. They would simply keep him here until morning, then they would come and offer him his freedom in exchange for satisfactory grades.

In spite of his dire circumstances, he could not restrain the smile that crept to his lips. Yes! That was it! The morons! And he would go along with them! He would change the grades! Certainly he would! Then, directly after his release, he would immediately rescind those grades at the office! After which, he would call the police and make formal charges! Kidnaping undoubtedly carried a stiff penalty of imprisonment! He would really show them yet who was the master.

Pontier did not know whether or not he slept that night. At some indefinite period of time, he became conscious of a brightening in the sky above, a brightening that slowly washed away the stars. He waited, knowing that they would come at dawn, that they would soon be here. And even as he mused upon the thought, he heard the sound of an approaching car. Then came footsteps through the weeds.

He tightened his lips against the smile that sought to lodge there as two masked individuals became suddenly visible directly above him.

"We hope by now," said a voice that certainly must belong to Bill

Sommes, "that you have arrived at the obvious."

"Y-yes," Pontier said.

"We have brought all the necessary papers for you to give us the grades we have rightfully earned."

"I will," Pontier said. "Just as soon as you get me out of here."

"Not so fast." The long, black hair of Ted Reeves was plainly visible behind his grotesque mask. "First things first. Now listen very carefully. We'll lower your briefcase to you, and you will make the necessary adjustments in your grade book and report sheets. Then you will write a letter of resignation to the proper college authorities, after which you will write a note to your landlady explaining why you were so suddenly called away. You see, Professor Pontier, we have taken all your personal belongings from your room and have packed them neatly so that it will not be necessary for you to return there."

"And then—then you will get me out of here?"

"We will not be here personally," said the one who was certainly Bill Sommes. "We'll be out of town on a school function. But we will send someone here tonight to inspect your work. That person will release you, provided your work is satisfactory."

"That person will also bring this one-way bus ticket," said Ted Reeves, holding up an oblong card, "and instructions concerning which bus to take out of town. Clear?"

"Y-yes," Pontier said. So that was it. They intended to drive him out of town.

"And don't ever come back!" said Bill Sommes.

They lowered the briefcase within a foot above his head and let it drop. He caught it with aching fingers and clutched it to him until both the sound of their footsteps and that of the retreating car had died in the distance. Then the smile returned to his lips. The fools! Didn't they know that he would take the next bus back to town and, less than an hour later, have them safely behind bars?

It was no small task to change the daily grades of twenty-one students in the grade book and to make out the final reports, Pontier was tired, hungry, and thirsty long before he had finished the chore. But he kept on, knowing that there was nothing he could do to improve his welfare at the present. He made the letter of resignation and the note to the landlady sound as convincing as possible. Then he waited, crouched first in one awkward position and then another, until the sky darkened and the stars came out again above him.

A different car was approaching. He could tell by the sound of the motor. Footsteps came, slowly and softly. Then a portion of the stars was blotted out as a lone figure leaned over the rim of the cistern. "Professor Pontier?"

The voice was but a faint

whisper that Pontier failed to recognize. "Yes," he said.

"I will lower a cord. Tie your briefcase to it."

Pontier felt about in the darkness until his fingers caught the cord. He tied it securely to the handle of the brief case but did not release it immediately.

"You—you will release me?" he asked. "You will get me out of here?" He needed reassurance, and he wanted to hear the voice again. For future reference, it was necessary that he recognize it.

"I have been instructed to get you out—" The throaty voice was vaguely familiar. "—provided the contents of your brief case are satisfactory."

He released his fingers and felt the briefcase slide swiftly upward. The beam of a flashlight split the darkness an instant, then became but a dim glow as the owner stepped away from the rim of the cistern.

Fear clutched Pontier. "You're not going to leave me here!" he shouted.

"I am merely checking the reports," came the half-familiar voice. "I must make certain."

Pontier waited. He knew now why Bill Sommes and the others had not come for him, why they

had sent someone else to set him free. The "school function" Bill Sommes had mentioned was merely a basketball game at a neighboring college. They had all gone to the game, of course, where they could leap up and down in various stages of depravity while screaming their silly heads off.

Well, it would be the last game for some of them! If a ladder or rope were sent down to him, he might be able to scramble up in time to catch the lone individual above, retrieve the briefcase, and force a positive identification.

"Just—just how are you going to get me out?" Pontier asked, wanting to hear the voice again.

"In a very obvious manner," said the voice. "Here."

Pontier felt something strike his shoulder and fall to his feet. He clutched at it eagerly, recognizing the voice at the same time. Naturally, she would be the one; she was not at all like the others; she could not find release in basketball.

Briefcase in hand, Millie Adams walked swiftly to her car, loathing glowing in her narrowed eyes. At the car, she took a bus ticket from her purse and set fire to it.

Back in the cistern, Pontier sank slowly to his knees and let the eraser fall from nerveless fingers.

THE STUBBLE OF BEARD

He was rich, very powerful—and very dead. Mei Wong sighed. When a rich man dies, Murder plays strange games.

by DAN ROSS



INSPECTOR BANNERJEE brought the sleek black sedan to a halt before one of the most elaborate mansions on the outskirts of Bombay. The chief of the great Indian city's homicide division glanced at his single passenger seated beside him.

"Very decent of you to give me this much of your time," he said.

"I only hope I may be of some

help," Mei Wong, the celebrated art dealer, told the inspector. The elderly Chinese was wearing his usual immaculate white linen suit and Panama hat. And as the car stopped he extracted a handkerchief from an inner pocket and mopped his broad, perspiring brow.

"Things have been going bad for Petersen," the inspector said, remaining seated in the car. "His

a MR. WONG and INSPECTOR BANNERJEE story



international investment business is at the point of collapse. I might have expected suicide. Instead he dies accidentally."

"It must have come as a great shock to his wife," Mei Wong said. "Only a few days ago I sold her a pair of exquisite jade earrings. She is a lovely young woman."

The inspector nodded. "I imagine she's badly upset. So far I know none of the details. Let us go inside and find out what happened."

They were met at the door by Ian Mason, John Petersen's partner, a stout man in his sixties with a crafty, florid face. "Thank goodness you're here at last, Inspector," was his greeting in a hoarse voice. He glanced at the short, dumpy figure of the white clad Mei Wong with some surprise. "And who is this gentleman?"

"He was a friend of the late Mr. Petersen," the inspector said. "Meet Mr. Mei Wong of the Bombay Art and Curio Company."

Ian Mason looked impressed. "Of course! I have heard the Petersens speak of you often." He paused to sigh. "If you'll follow me upstairs, gentlemen! A sad business!"

Inspector Bannerjee continued the conversation as they mounted the stairs with the rotund Mei Wong following several steps behind. "Mr. Petersen had been suffering a financial crisis, hadn't he?"

Ian Mason shrugged his broad shoulders. "We've been having some rough days lately."

"Was it true the firm is on the verge of bankruptcy?" the inspector asked.

"I wouldn't care to admit that," the dead financier's partner said coldly. And he led them along the carpeted hallway to a door that apparently belonged to the bathroom.

Mei Wong quickly took in the details of the big room. It was decorated in coral and white and the financier was still lying in the well-filled tub, covered by a big towel. Next to the body and extending from a length of electric cord was an electric shaver. The other end of the cord was plugged into an outlet by the wash basin. There could be no question as to how John Petersen had met his death.

Inspector Bannerjee frowned as he stared at the body. "Surely a man of his intelligence must have been aware of the hazards of using a razor in his bath?"

Ian Mason's florid face showed disgust. "Petersen was not an easy man to reason with. Often he would summon me in here while he was having his bath for some urgent call. Several times I found him shaving and warned him against it. But he refused to listen to me."

Mei Wong's broad face was quite bare of expression as he studied the dead man. Then he turned to Ian Mason.

"Mr. Petersen has a stubble of beard that it must have taken several days to accumulate," he said casually.

The florid-faced man looked uneasy. "We've been having a bad time here, as the inspector pointed out. Petersen hardly ate or slept during the past four or five days. We've had hourly reports coming in from our offices in London and



New York. It's been like a nightmare."

"And this is the climax of it all," inspector Bannerjee said, turning away from the corpse. "I suppose in his upset state of mind he somehow let the razor fall into the water. By the way, who discovered the body?"

"Mrs. Petersen," Mason said. "She's downstairs in the living room if you'd like to discuss it with her."

Greta Petersen looked lovely even in her pathetic, wan-faced grief. She greeted Mei Wong and the inspector with a graciousness that was touching under the circumstances.

"What a dreadful accident!" she said brokenly.

Mei Wong nodded. "And what a shock for you to be the one to find him."

"Yes," she spoke in a low, tense voice.

The inspector inquired, "Could you explain just what happened?"

The lovely dark-haired woman sighed. "John and I quarreled a few days ago. We had not spoken to each other since that time. He was absorbed with his financial problems and I blamed him for his speculations." She paused and bowed her head. "I believe I was right in my stand but I wish there had been no argument between us."

"Don't blame yourself," the inspector advised her gently. "Just go on giving us what details you can of the way he met his death."

"Yes," she said. And after a pause: "I went to his room for a talk about things. I felt the quarrel had been wrong and was looking for a reconciliation. He wasn't in his room, but I heard the whir of his razor from the bathroom. Knowing he was in there, I knocked on the door and called his name. He invited me to come in. As I entered he looked toward the door and it was at that moment he somehow let the electric razor slip from his hand. He cried out as it struck the water and it was all over. I ran for help!"

"And brought me to the scene,"

Ian Mason filled in from his stand by the young woman's high-backed chair.

"Who else is in the house beside the servants?" Inspector Bannerjee asked.

Ian Mason and Greta Petersen exchanged glances. Then the dark-haired woman said, "Only Ralph Wells, my late husband's personal secretary. And he is on the point of leaving. He and my husband had a serious disagreement."

Ian Mason took up the explanation with an embarrassed look on his lined, florid face. "It was purely a minor thing. Under ordinary circumstances John Petersen would not have paid any attention to it. Wells neglected to send a special message to London. Because Petersen was in such an upset state anyway he raged at the young man about it and dismissed him."

Mei Wong raised his eyebrows. "It would seem that Mr. Petersen has not been his normal self since his troubles began?"

The financier's corpulent partner shrugged. "I hardly think any man would have stood the strain better than Petersen," he said. "Our company is actually on the point of collapse."

"Yet you seem very calm," the old art dealer said shrewdly.

Inspector Bannerjee got the point and eyed Mason with suspicion. "That is so."

Ian Mason looked unhappy. "It

does not mean as much to me. I have other interests."

"How fortunate," the inspector said dryly. "May we talk to this young man, Ralph Wells?"

Ralph Wells was a handsome young Britisher of the type found in many colonial enterprises. He was wearing gray flannel slacks and a blue blazer with a university crest.

He eyed the inspector with defiance. "I suppose you're trying to drag me into this, since I happened to be on bad terms with my employer!"

"Please don't take that attitude, Ralph," Greta Petersen warned him from her chair. "These gentlemen want to help."

"I'm sure of that!" the young man said with sarcasm. "As far as I'm concerned I'm glad Petersen is dead. He deserved it. He swindled thousands, but when it came his turn he couldn't stand up to it. He behaved like a madman around here all this last week. Hardly saying two words to any of us. Locking himself in his study, making dozens of long-distance calls, and expecting us to be able to read his mind!"

Inspector Bannerjee gave the young Britisher a reproving glance. "We are not likely to blame you, since we have Mrs. Petersen's eyewitness account of the accident that took her husband's life. Your questioning is a matter of routine."

Ian Mason spoke up. "Just how

much of this routine is there apt to be?"

"It should not be too onerous," the inspector said. "My men will make the usual check of the scene. Mr. Wong and myself will be spending a brief time here. Then the body will be turned over to Mrs. Petersen to make the required funeral arrangements."

An hour later the inspector came to Mei Wong in the study of the late financier. The old Chinaman was seated at Petersen's desk, studying a pad of notes and other items scattered on it when the tall, turbanned Bannerjee entered.

The inspector said, "So far we've found nothing suspicious. There were no fingerprints on the razor except those of Petersen himself, and they were pretty well blotted out."

Mei Wong gave him a peculiar glance. "I have been going through Mr. Petersen's notes and I have made a phone call as a result. I think what I have discovered may be of interest to Mrs. Petersen and the others in the house. If you will call them."

They were all gathered in the living room again and Inspector

Bannerjee now turned to the old Chinese art dealer. Mr. Wong stepped forward to Ian Mason.

Addressing the dead man's partner, he said, "You admit Petersen was not on speaking terms with any of you for at least forty-eight hours before his death?"

"Yes, sir!" The florid-faced man looked uneasy.

"Then that explains everything," Mei Wong told them. "During that time he phoned his doctor and was given advice. I was intrigued by the growth of whisker on his face. When I saw the doctor's number on his desk pad I called and made some inquiries. I found that John Petersen had been suffering from an old skin allergy induced by his nervous state and had been advised by his doctor not to shave for at least ten days!"

Wong turned to Greta Petersen. "Of course you didn't know that, Mrs. Petersen, when you entered the bathroom and deliberately plugged the razor in and tossed it in his tub. You were thinking of his insurance and perhaps your interest in Mr. Wells, who had just received his dismissal. You acted swiftly but too rashly!"



Watch for more MR. MEI WONG stories by DAN ROSS

PEABODY'S OBSESSION

*There's a price on every
man. For life . . . For Death*

by HAL ELLSON

THE AVENUE attracted Peabody, specifically those twelve running blocks between the subway station and his place of business. An interesting thoroughfare it was,



strung with antique shops, beautiful objects on display. All else was ugliness on the avenue, but beyond the windows . . . another world, the work of master craftsmen vanished from the earth.

Now not all the shops were quality. Some were traps for the unwary.

And Mendel's? A hole-in-the-wall, gloomy interior beyond that small fantastic window with its conglomeration of junk and tasteless items. Yet Peabody paused there often.

Books were the lure. At ten cents apiece, he couldn't go wrong—with sometimes a find. Antiques and old books. A clue to his character?

Peabody's initial impression of Mendel was fortified the second occasion he entered his dirty uncatalogued junkyard. Antique dealer, or character of a shadowy world and divers operations—what was he?

The day was warm, the door open. Two men stood in the gloomy rear, in angry debate, then suddenly mute and aware of Peabody, guilt in their eyes, violent dialogue still echoing the price of a gun.

Peabody glimpsed it. It was not an antique. Obviously Mendel did business under the counter as well as above it.

Peabody bought two books. Interesting items at ten cents apiece. *How much, Mr. Mendel, would*

you charge for the gun? he wondered.

But it wasn't the gun that brought them together. A painting did, and only by chance. If Peabody hadn't felt sick, if he hadn't gone to the rest room. Twenty years with the same company and he'd never entered that room. But now—

A surprise. Comfortable chairs, couches, a fireplace. The walls covered with pictures in heavy gold frames, a drab and unimpressive collection. A glance at them and he sat down and closed his eyes but, later, as he started to leave, the pictures caught his attention and he circled the room slowly.

A dull lot, copies most of them, but four were originals and one bore the name of an English painter of the late 19th century. No matter his real name. Kingsly will do. How much would a Kingsly bring? Ten thousand?

Excited, Peabody hurried to the office of his friend, Paul Carroll, who knew his way around the galleries. Paul's estimate—at least twenty-thousand dollars in the present market.

Peabody's excitement rose. Twenty-thousand dollars hanging on a wall and gathering dust and no one, with the exception of Paul, knew it was there. By right of discovery, couldn't he claim it? But how? Who'd recognize the claim? What alternative? Steal the paint-

ing? Impossible. Abdicate? There was nothing else to do.

That night he couldn't sleep. At last he arose, smoked a cigarette, had a drink and sat by a window. It was just before dawn, everything was at rest—except for himself. Peace outside and agony within him. A second drink and the stillness intensified. He returned to bed. Was he dreaming, or half-awake when he heard the word Ludlow?

Green shadows and flecks of sunlight were in the room when he awoke. A heightened sense of well-being flooded him. Reasonless, he thought, and then he recalled the night and the name.

Ludlow. Earlier it had meant nothing. Now—

He couldn't get to the job fast enough.

In fact, he arrived too early, and Ludlow's secretary didn't show in till ten-thirty.

Dottie, very attractive, highly intelligent. For a while she and Peabody had been serious about each other. Water under a bridge. It didn't affect their friendship. If he wanted a favor, he went to her and she always came through. She could help him now, for Ludlow's weakness was women. Dottie could wrap him around her little finger. She also happened to despise him.

At ten-thirty she arrived. Peabody greeted her, joked about her habitual lateness, then casually

mentioned the painting. Could she use the magic touch on Ludlow?

"When do you want the painting?" she said with a grin.

"There's no rush, but—"

"All right. As soon as I have a chance to speak to Mr. L. you'll have your painting."

"Thanks. You're sweet."

Dottie smiled and he left her, sure that the painting was his, but there was more to do. Arrange to sell the painting. For twenty-thousand dollars? A nice sum to reflect upon, but he couldn't take the painting to a gallery: questions would be asked. A legitimate dealer might involve him with the police.

Ah, but Mendel. He'd be interested, and there'd be no embarrassing questions. But, dealing with him, he couldn't expect twenty-thousand dollars. Perhaps half that sum.

By noon his nerves were frayed. Mendel might not want the painting, or offer too little. These thoughts wracked him as he made his way to the antique shop.

Sweat bathed him when he reached it. The sun beat down; the avenue looked stricken. The shop appeared deserted.

He peered inside, saw no sign of life, then, beyond the glass and back in the shadows, Mendel grinned and waved, came forward, unlocked the door, opened it.

"Too hot for business," he said. "I was just going home."

"A minute of your time," Peabody begged. "This is urgent."

Mendel hesitated, then caught the scent and beckoned him in. The door closed, locked tightly. Odd, thought Peabody, moving forward to a small space before a counter so crowded with junk that nothing was to be seen of it.

"I would ask you to sit down," said Mendel, "but there's no place to sit. Cigarette?" He offered his pack, dropped his eyes. Peabody didn't accept. Mendel lit up, his eyes still averted.

"Would you be interested in an original Kingsly?" Peabody began.

"An original Kingsly? Hm. You have it?"

"If you're interested, I'll bring it."

"Hm, I was going home to nap, but—"

"It'll take a little time. Perhaps in a day or so."

"Whenever you're ready to bring it in, Mr.—"

"Smith."

"All right, Mr. Smith." Mendel smiled half-derisively and stepped aside. "Please close the door after you."

As hot as it was, Peabody was glad to step outside. At least, he could breathe and he didn't feel contaminated. Twenty minutes later he was back at his job. All was in readiness now. A buyer for the painting, and Dottie to do the rest. At three he went to her office.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Don't worry about the painting, dear."

"But—"

"My, you're anxious."

"I'm not," he insisted, but Dottie knew better. She was no one's fool. Had he made a mistake by attempting to use her?

"I saw your painting," she said and shook her head. "Awfully dull. There's a much nicer one—"

"No, thanks. I want the one I told you about. Are you sure you can get it?"

"Of course. I haven't asked Mr. L. yet. He's in conference, you know, and not in a particularly good mood. It's better to wait and I'll have him wrap it for you."

"Don't bring my name into it!"

"I understand."

"Ah, you're a doll." He blew her a kiss and left. He had no doubt she'd get the painting.

On the following day he saw Dottie again and was let down. Mr. L. wasn't himself and couldn't be approached, Dottie explained. All that week he remained in a mood, and on Friday Peabody was due to go on vacation. Again he saw Dottie.

"Don't worry," she told him. "I'll have the painting when you come back."

Don't worry? He endured two weeks of wracking torture, returned to work and went immediately to Dottie's office. As usual, she was late, so he went to his own



office, occupied himself with the mail that had gathered in his absence and at noon arose from his desk. Again he went to see Dottie, but she had gone to lunch.

Irritated, he went off to the rest room, entered it and stopped. A yawning blank space showed where the Kingsly had hung. Had Dottie gotten it? Two hours later he found her at her desk. She greeted him as usual, asked about his vacation, but didn't mention the painting. He was forced to speak, and her face went blank.

"The painting's gone?" she said.

"There's just a blank space on the wall."

Dottie shrugged. "I spoke to Mr. L. about it and he told me I

could have it, but you know how he is. He probably forgot, and I didn't bother to remind him because you were on vacation."

Peabody shook his head. "Ludlow didn't forget. He took it for himself."

"That awful picture in that awful frame? Don't be silly. What would he do with it?"

"It's strange, isn't it? The painting hung in that room for twenty years. No one was interested in it until you asked for it. Then suddenly it vanished."

"So, there's more where it came from. I'll—"

"Damn it, I don't want any other."

Dottie's brows came up. "If it's that important, I'll speak to Mr. L. I'll make him give it to me."

"Don't bother. It's not that important," Peabody replied. What else could he say? If Ludlow had the painting, then he knew its value and would never give it up. Besides, if he pressed the issue with Dottie, she'd know he'd used her. Lost. The painting was lost.

He returned to his office, but work was out of the question. He kept thinking of the painting. Ludlow had stolen it. Ludlow was the thief. But was he really?

A week later Peabody stepped into a bar after office hours and there was Dottie. Stopping to chat with her, he noticed a ring on her finger. It was no ordinary ring, and he immediately thought of the

painting. So Dottie was the thief. He wanted to throw his drink in her face.

"Are you feeling all right?" she asked, noticing the sudden change in him.

"Quite all right," he snapped and took her hand. His tone was malicious now. "A very beautiful, very expensive ring. Could you really afford it?"

He expected to fluster her, but she beamed into his face. "Isn't it something? You'd never guess who gave it to me."

"Someone gave it to you?"

"Mr. L. Can you imagine? Yesterday morning he came in and slipped it on my finger. To a very smart secretary, he said, whatever that was supposed to mean."

Her award for alerting Ludlow about the painting, but Peabody couldn't tell her that. He shrugged, finished his drink.

"Sorry, I have to leave."

"No, wait. I've something to tell you. It's supposed to be top-secret. You're being promoted."

Peabody blinked. "Promoted? Why?"

"Because Mr. L. thinks you've been doing a great job. He put your name up for supervisor, which is the same as having the job. Congratulations."

"Thanks."

"What's wrong? You don't seem pleased."

"I am. Thanks again for telling me. Good night."

Outside the bar, Peabody slowed his steps. The news of the promotion meant one thing only: Ludlow's guilt and an attempt to alleviate it.

The next morning, as usual, Mendel's shop appeared deserted, but the two racks outside were stacked with books. Peabody stopped, browsed, selected a book, entered the gloomy shop, saw no sign of Mendel and started toward the rear, taking a path beset with rubber boots, books, tools, lamps and what-not, a path that apparently led nowhere.

He halted and voices came to him. One was Mendel's, the other? Familiar and yet— The voices faded, a door opened in back, light sprang from a small office and Mendel appeared.

"Ah, Mr. Smith, I've been waiting for you. You brought the Kingsly?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Changed your mind? Too bad. Well, perhaps some other time." A shrug, a smile and Mendel beckoned with a soft white hand. "As an admirer of Kingsly, I'm sure you'll be interested."

Peabody came forward, entered the small office, which was as neat and uncluttered as the rest of the shop was otherwise. That alone was unsettling, but no one was there. Had Mendel been talking to himself? But that was of no consequence now, for a painting on the desk caught his eye.

"How do you like it?" Mendel's voice and a chuckle came from behind. Peabody turned abruptly about.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded.

"From a gentleman whose name I can't disclose."

"You mean a thief named Ludlow."

"The name is unfamiliar, I assure you."

"Then a young girl brought it to you?"

"No, the seller was not a young girl." Mendel was laughing from his pale blue eyes, rubbing his stained vest. "So what is the difference who brought me the painting? It's mine now."

"The painting was stolen," Peabody said in a deceptively flat voice.

"Really? From what museum? Which millionaire? I haven't read about it in the papers."

"That painting was stolen from me, Mr. Mendel."

Mendel's mouth tightened. "You're saying I bought a painting that belongs to you. I assume that that is correct. May I also assume that you reported the theft to the police?"

"I didn't report it, but—"

"Ah, why not? Please don't answer if you find the question embarrassing." The antique dealer grinned and nodded. "Now do you wish to claim the painting? Ah, I see you don't answer. Why not?

Did you yourself steal it, and lose it to someone else? Too bad, my friend."

Peabody had turned away, was moving toward the door when Mendel's last phrase stopped him in his tracks. The words rankled. He turned, and Mendel noticed the book in his hand.

"That will be ten cents," he said, smiling, and his customer advanced toward him.

A gruesome murder. Peabody dealt methodically with Mendel, using an assortment of dubious antiques, including an iron oil-lamp. Done with him, he went to the front door, locked it, turned the *back later* sign, then retreated to the office, carefully wrapped the painting and left.

Next morning the newspapers carried the account of the murder. There was no mention of the painting. Peabody was relieved.

Later in the morning, his phone rang. He picked it up and the voice he'd heard yesterday in Mendel's office and couldn't place, that same voice, identifiable now, came over the wire.

There was no mistaking it. It belonged to the one who'd stolen the Kingsly painting and sold it to Mendel. He'd hidden himself in Mendel's office yesterday, witnessed the murder and now, slowly, harshly and precisely, Peabody's good friend, Paul Carroll, demanded payment for his silence—the Kingsly painting.

Continued from other side)

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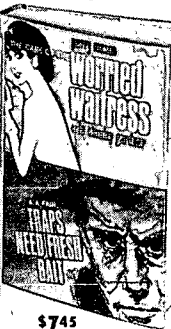
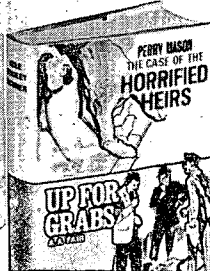
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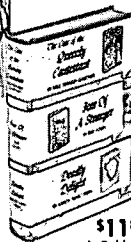


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